

quæ amarulentia nolita degultati la-
est: unica in perferendo cruciatu ani-
equitate ac lenitate. Si osculo proda-
coarguit quidem, sed non percutit: si
ito corripitur, ita exprobrat, ut tamen
uatur: si zelo inflammatus Malchi au-
gladio præcide
loco suo resti
ictus profugiat,
lomiticum adve
ir, poposceris,
: filatronem ob
n acceperit, eun
adifum introdu
rifi benigna on
rifi passionis: q
d majus ac præf
is mortem ipia
tulerit, nos con
fas & injurias a
ius? *Quin* hæc c
n, atque etiam n
videte) de quit
e differui. Hi de
hi templa, ne
quod viva vive
iæ vivæ, holo

THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH



LACTANTIUS
THE DIVINE INSTITUTES,
BOOKS I-VII

Translated by Sister Mary Francis McDonald, O.P.

icia perfecta, Diî denique, Trinitatis
beneficio. Hi populos habent, nos
os: hi temeritatem & audaciam, nos
hi minas, nos orationes: hi quod per
int, nos quod ferimus: hi aurum & ar
um, nos repurgatam doctrinam. Feci
i 42 duplices & triplices contignatio-
agnosce Scripturæ verba) domum
futilem, fenestris distinctam: at hæc
um fide mea sublimiora sunt, nec cœ-
a quos tendo. At mihi grex exiguus?
in præcipitia non fertur. At angusta mi-
aula? sed quæ lupis non pateat, sed quæ
onem non admittat, nec a furibus, & ex-
is transcendatur. Nec dubito quin eam
oque latiore aliquando visurus sim.
Lactantius. <The Divine Institutes>, Catholic University of America Press, 1964; ProQuest Ebook Central
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οὐκ ὦν τῇ πικραν ρευστίνῃ ἑσπεραπνευσ-
τῆς ἐν τῷ πάθῃ μακροθυμίας ο
τι προδοθῇ. ἐλέγχει μὲν, ἔπλη
ἄφνω συλληφθῇ, ὀνειδίζει μὲν, ἐπὶ
μαχαίρα Μάλχῃ τέμνης τὸ ὦπ

ἀποκαλασῇ
ρισελεῖ κ
ἐς ἀγониᾶς,
διὰ κακίαν
εἰσάξῃ διὰ
λανθρώπῃς,
-ἔ παθημά
Θεῷ καὶ θαν
ὁμοίοις μηδ
-ρὸς δὲ καὶ
ομαι, καὶ ση
ἢ πολλάνικ
τοι τὰς οἴκ
; ἡμεῖς τὸν
ῶν! Ὁ καὶ ζ
ματὰ λογικ
ἀδ Ὁ προσ

ἔτοι δῆμους, ἡμεῖς ἀγγέλους ἔτ
πίσω ἡμεῖς ἔτοι τὸ ἀπειλεῖν, ἡρ
εὐχεσθαι ἔτοι τὸ βάλλειν, ἡμε
ἔτοι χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον, ἡμεῖς
θαρμένον. ἐποίησας σεαυτῷ διῶρ
ροφα; γινώσκει τὰ ῥήματα τῆ γραφ
πισὸν, διεσπασμένον θυρίσιν, ἀλλ
τῆ ἐμῆς πίσεως ὑψηλότερα καὶ τ
ἐς φέρομαι. μικρὸν μοι τὸ ποίμ
ἐπὶ κρημνῶν φερόμενον. σενή μ
πλήν λύκοις ἀνεπίδρατ Ὁ, π
δεχομένη λησὴν, ἐδὲ ὑπερβαινομε
καὶ ξένοις. ὅψομαι ταύτην εὐοῖ
πυλῶν, πολλὰς καὶ τῶν νῦν λε
βάτοις ἀριθμῆσαι με δεῖ τυχόν

THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

A NEW TRANSLATION

VOLUME 49

THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

A NEW TRANSLATION

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LACTANTIUS

THE DIVINE INSTITUTES

BOOKS I-VII

Translated by
SISTER MARY FRANCIS McDONALD, O.P.

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IN MEMORY OF

MY

FATHER AND MOTHER

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION



UCIUS CAELIUS (CAECILIUS) FIRMIANUS, or Lactantius, as he is generally called, lived through one of the greatest turning points in the history of Europe. It has been aptly described as the moment when the old world of paganism was in travail, when against its will it gave birth to the Christian Empire.¹ The writings of this author are, together with those of Eusebius,² the principal sources for the period of the great persecution of Diocletian and for the first years of the peace of the Church after the Edict of Milan. For the period of the Council of Nicaea there is somewhat more abundant source material,³ but for the years 312 to 324 reliance must be made upon Eusebius and Lactantius. Both may be considered to have written with considerable bias. They are too extravagant in praise of Constantine; Lactantius especially manifested an *odium theologicum* toward Galerius and the persecutors. Their works are still of high value, however, as historical sources. From the time of the studies of

1 Cf. N. H. Baynes, 'The Great Persecution,' *Cambridge Ancient History* 12, 646.

2 Eusebius of Caesarea (265-340) wrote a *Chronicle* up until the year 324. This was continued for the years 324-379 by St. Jerome. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius also stops at 324. He also wrote a *Panegyric* and *Life of Constantine*. Cf. trans. of Eusebius, Vol. 19, this series.

3 St. Augustine and St. Athanasius from a slightly later period; St. Jerome and the later Church historians, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret; and by pagans, numerous panegyrics of the period, orations, and poetic compositions eulogizing emperors and members of their families. Cf. also the fragments of the *New History* by the Byzantine Zosimus, a pagan very hostile to the Christian emperors.

Maurice,⁴ moreover, the evidence of numismatics has verified the historical accounts of these contemporary sources.

The writings of Lactantius, therefore, were composed in one of the most eventful epochs of ecclesiastical history. The Church, after suffering the most severe of despotic persecutions, was suddenly received under state protection and began to enjoy, not merely tranquility and legal status, but even a considerable portion of political influence. The fourth century saw the great fusion of the Christian Church with the Roman state and Hellenistic culture, the fusion which was to spell out Western civilization and determine its achievements.

The decline of paganism paved the way for the reception into the Church of doctors, lawyers, rhetors, and the men of culture of the day. Many, however, were still repelled by the simplicity of Christian writings. For those who so highly valued literary form and elaborate style Lactantius wrote his apologetic works. Their permanent importance rests on the fact that one versed in the style and thought of Cicero made his appeal through this style and thought to men of culture. Lactantius selected for his apologetics the discussion of those problems with which the pagans of his day were struggling. He vindicated for them their own philosophic bases, championed an alliance of reason and faith, and made reason state the cause for the monotheism of the Christians.

Perhaps no other writer is more completely revealing of his own times. As pagan rhetoricians were abandoning the schools and the philosophers, the culture of the old world was being saved in the very Church that was charged with its destruction. Lactantius is a sharer of Minucius Felix' attitude toward the traditional culture.⁵ He believed that it possessed a vitality,

4 Cf. Jules Maurice, 'La veracité-historique de Lactance,' *Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles Lettres: Comptes Rendus des Séances* (March 1908).

5 Cf. Gerard Eldspermann, *The Attitude of the Early Christian Writers toward Pagan Literature and Learning*, C.U.A. Patristic Studies, Vol. 82 (Washington 1949).

that its treasure should be preserved, that the 'spoils of the Egyptians could become the pride of the despised Galilaeans.'⁶ In the very act of despoiling them, however, he assigned himself the task of addressing those Egyptians and, in a number of essential features, accepted their own literature and learning. In this way he saved much of their culture for the Church and became thereby one of the founders of Christian humanism.⁷

Thus, the traditional and only true humanism seeks the completion of man while it regards that completion as ultimately supernatural. The glorious ages of revival, the fourth and fifth centuries, the thirteenth, the most important of all intellectually, the sixteenth with its counter-reformation, and today's stalwart support of liberal studies by the Church have reaffirmed the sound conviction of Lactantius that humanism has its strongest ally in the truths of the Church, the new religion at the time of the African rhetor.

Little is known of the life of Lucius Caelius Firmianus, Lactantius. From the brief account by St. Jerome in *De viris illustribus* 80, the major outlines of his career have been constructed.

Because his *floruit* is assigned to the reign of Diocletian, under whose patronage he held a chair of rhetoric at Nicomedia, and because as an old man he enjoyed the familiarity of Constantine and served as tutor to his son, Crispus, it is believed that he was born some time around 250-260, very probably in Numidia, Africa.⁸ After he had completed the ordinary classical studies of the time, he attended the lectures of Arnobius at Sicca.

⁶ Cf. Baynes, *op. cit.* 647.

⁷ Cf. especially on this point M. R. P. McGuire, 'Medieval Humanism,' *Catholic Historical Review* Vol. 38 (January 1953) 397-409, where truly Christian humanism is accurately presented as a synthesis and one that has been achieved through the normal historical processes of development.

⁸ Firmianus in Italy has been suggested as his birthplace because of his name Firmianus, but epigraphical evidences of Latin and Italian names in Africa and African names elsewhere reject the suggestion. Furthermore, his being the pupil of Arnobius points to his African origin.

This teacher-pupil contact remains one of the great unknowns in the history of literary influence. The careers of the two men which crossed in the last half of the third century and before the accession of Diocletian in 284, although similar in some respects, were very different in others. Both were pagans; both were rhetoricians; both were probably converted through the influence of Christian fortitude under persecution. Arnobius practiced his profession in his native Sicca Veneria, Africa. In order to give to his bishop, who was suspicious of the one-time vigorous opponent of Christianity, proof of his loyalty to the new faith, he wrote his *Adversus nationes*.⁹ The seven books filled a need for the time in which they were written; they also fill a place in the grand tradition of literary Christian apologies.

That Lactantius nowhere in his writings refers to his teacher should not seem strange. By 290, Lactantius was a professor of Latin rhetoric at Nicomedia in Bithynia on the Propontis,¹⁰ an official appointee of Diocletian. He probably never heard of the conversion of Arnobius some few years later, nor of his novel apology written around 303 during the persecution of Diocletian.¹¹ Perhaps Lactantius never realized that he was following the steps of his master in turning to Christianity and in bringing his pagan erudition and rhetoric to its service in the writing of literary defense, in which field he superseded his teacher.

Lactantius remained at Nicomedia for some time, but there were few pupils in a town comprising Greeks, Orientals, and barbarians with little respect for the language of Cicero. As a diversion, as well as a means of perfecting his style, he decided to turn to writing. St. Jerome lists several works of this period which are no longer extant.¹² There was a *Symposium* in im-

9 Cf. G. E. McCracken, *Arnobius of Sicca, the Case against the Pagans*, Ancient Christian Writers, 7 and 8 (Westminster, Md. 1949).

10 From 285 on, that town was the residence of Diocletian.

11 *Cambridge Ancient History* 12, 607.

12 These were lost by the time of St. Robert Bellarmine, who notes the fact in his *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis, de Lactantio Firmiano* 290 (Cologne 1622) 68-69.

itation of Plato; a *Hodoiporicon*, a description of his journey from Africa to his new home written in hexameters; a *Grammaticus*, two books to Asclepiades;¹³ and collections of letters: four books to Probus, two to Severus, and two to Demetrianus. Pope St. Damasus knew these books of letters, and he regretted that they dealt only with profane subjects.¹⁴

The conversion of Lactantius occurred about 300. He retained his position and continued to live in Nicomedia for a while longer. After Diocletian's abdication, however, and the closing of the schools by Galerius in 305 and 306, Lactantius lost his chair, was reduced to poverty, and forced to leave the city. Although he was never in the hands of torturers, he did suffer greatly and often was destitute.¹⁵

Perhaps it was after the Toleration Edict of Galerius¹⁶ that he returned to Nicomedia. At any rate, there was a definite change in his affairs after 313, the date of the Edict of Milan. About 316 his friendship with Constantine (Constantine had been at Diocletian's court in Nicomedia, at least from 296 until 305, when he realized that the court of Galerius was no place for him) secured for him the position of tutor for the young Crispus, son of Constantine, born in 307.¹⁷ So the impoverished master was summoned in extreme old age to Trèves in Gaul. He devoted himself to his task with such earnestness that he barely gave time to the editing of his works. Thus it is that nothing is known of his last years and death.

His chief works were written after his conversion, between 300 and 317. These have been preserved and they are respon-

¹³ This is probably the Asclepiades who addressed a work on Providence to Lactantius. Lactantius mentions him and quotes from him in the *Institutes* 7.4.17.

¹⁴ This is noted by Bardy in *Christian Literature of the First Six Centuries* 58-63.

¹⁵ The persecution was marked in the East by unlimited brutality and injustice under the coarse Galerius and the licentious Maximin, his Caesar.

¹⁶ This was published in Nicomedia on April 30, 311, perhaps caused by the terrible disease from which Galerius suffered. Cf. Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 34; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 8.17; and Zosimus, *Historiae* 2.11.

¹⁷ On Constantine's early stay in Nicomedia, cf. bibliography, Holsapple, 106ff.

sible for his reputation. The *De opificio Dei* (*The Workmanship of God*), written during 303-305, is a graceful and pleasing exposition of the providence of God manifested in the creation of man, body as well as soul, and a refutation of Epicurean notions that man is a creature unworthy of God.

His greatest apologetical work is contained in the seven books entitled *Divinae institutiones*, dedicated to Constantine and intended as a Christian counterpart of those 'Institutes' which lay down the principles of civil law. The titles of the seven books show the grandeur and originality of conception of the treatise. The entire work forms a summary of Christian teaching.

The work was further summarized by the author himself in the *Epitome*,¹⁸ a sixty-seven chapter abridgement addressed to a certain Pentadius and written after 314. Even in St. Jerome's time this work was considered mutilated (he calls it a title-less work, *librum acephalum*), but the quotation of Sacred Scripture is more frequent in it than in the *Institutes*, the reliance on the sibyls has been laid aside, and moral prescriptions are more detailed. Lactantius' purpose was, no doubt, to make the work more useable for Christians. His purpose in writing previously had been to convince the educated pagan; hence, his use of their sources exceeds that of Christian works.

The *Divine Institutes* will be translated and treated in the present volume. The *De opificio Dei* and the other works as listed below will form the content of a second volume.

The *De ira Dei* (*The Anger of God*), announced in the *Divinae institutiones*,¹⁹ develops the thesis popular in philosophical circles of his time: whether God, immutable and sovereignly perfect, can be subject to anger, a passion. The proof is offered that in God anger is a perfection because it serves to manifest His power. The work was not written, or

¹⁸ Because of its nature as a summary, the *Epitome* has not been translated for this collection of the works of Lactantius.

¹⁹ Cf. *Divinae Institutiones* 2.17.4.

published, until after 313. It is associated with the next work in celebration of the triumph of God's punishment of persecutors.

De mortibus persecutorum (*The Deaths of the Persecutors*), written very probably between 314 and 317, is historical as well as apologetical. In it Lactantius serves with Eusebius of Caesarea to provide us with contemporary Christian sources for the period of 303-313, the last and most dreadful years of Roman persecution of Christianity. Though the work comes down in a single manuscript, of Paris, eleventh century, the Lactantian authorship is no longer questioned. The work is pamphlet-like in style. Lactantius possessed too much first-hand acquaintance with his subject matter to be impartial or impersonal in his recounting. It has been said that no more terrible picture has been drawn than that left us by Lactantius of 'this murderous strife between the hungry treasury and the worn-out people, who could suffer and die, but not pay.'²⁰

Besides these, there are a fragmentary piece and some other works which are attributed to Lactantius. The little portion, *De motibus animi* (*The Affections of the Soul*), could well be a part of a lost work on the passions or emotions, perhaps an outgrowth of the *De opificio Dei*.

The poem, *De ave phoenice*, tells the familiar story of the phoenix. This ancient myth of the phoenix, the narration in Herodotus (11.73) being the earliest extant, received its first Christian treatment by Clement of Rome. He made it a symbol of the resurrection. Lactantius (and the weight of evidence is in favor of his authorship of the poem) presents the fable in eighty-five distichs and adds a number of features that are Christian in origin.

Some of the manuscripts attribute the poems *De resurrectione* and *De pascha* to Lactantius, but the oldest testify to the authorship of Venantius Fortunatus. And the poem, *De passione Domini*, may not be by Lactantius, but, since a more

²⁰ Michelet, *History of France* I, 3, quoted by Louis Duchesne, II, 44 (see bibliography).

probable author has not yet been supplied for it, it has been included with the translations of the present series.

E. K. Rand, so deservedly well known and respected in the field of late Latin and early Christian writers, has stated that Lactantius laid the foundations of Christian humanism.²¹ Certainly this was the feeling of the humanists of the Renaissance. From that period on he has been known as the Christian Cicero. In that period he enjoyed his greatest popularity. The manuscript copies of his works are most numerous for the period of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, though the earliest are from the ninth, and Dufresnoy²² enumerates eighty-six editions of his entire works from 1461 to 1739. Etymology-loving litterateurs liked to think that his name was derived from *lactea eloquentia*, 'of milky-rich eloquence,' and Gibbon rated him as 'the most eloquent of the Christians.' Typical of the period is Pica de la Mirandola's praise: 'Who does not know that Lactantius has equaled Cicero and perhaps surpassed him in eloquence?'²³

This reputation of Lactantius, however, rests not solely upon the superficialities of discernment of the Renaissance humanists. The elegance of his style and its closeness to that of Cicero received acclamation from no less a critic than St. Jerome,²⁴ whose statement that Lactantius approached Cicero in eloquence has been reiterated through the ages. Bossuet read him thoughtfully and owed to him several of his profound thoughts in their magnificent expression. Many of the great orators and writers of the ages appreciated his style;²⁵ it is sufficient to know that the greatest thought well of him.

21 Cf. his 'Latin Literature in the West from the Antonines to Constantine,' *Cambridge Ancient History* 12.609; also his *Founders of the Middle Ages*.

22 Dufresnoy is the editor of Lactantius, who was followed by the Migne ed.; cf. his *Praefatio in Lactantium* (PL 6.57-88).

23 Cf. 'Liber de studio divinae et humanae philosophiae,' ch. 7, *Opera* (Basle 1601).

24 Cf. Jerome, *Epistle* 58.16.

25 Cf. Kathleen E. Hartwell, *Lactantius and Milton* (Cambridge, Mass. 1929).

Eusebius, his contemporary, bore witness to his merit as the most eloquent writer of his age,²⁶ and he was honorably and approvingly cited by St. Augustine.²⁷ And if on the whole he has fared badly at the hands of historians of Christian Latin literature, it is perhaps due to the unfairness of comparing him with writers of other periods and backgrounds. From a consideration of his own time (he is the last of the Latin Fathers before the Council of Nicaea, and in his day pagan Latin literature was practically nil), he is eminent. Bardenhewer seems most fair to him when he says: 'He is more comprehensive and versatile than Arnobius in his literary work, while his style is more chaste, natural, and pleasing than that of any of his contemporaries.'²⁸

His role is an interesting one in the field of Christian Latin apologetics. He saw all around him multitudes of the simple and ignorant crowding the Church, yet the intellectuals were turning away with contempt. He suffered intensely at this²⁹ and determined to do something about it.

He was a man of learning himself, a philosopher too, of ability though not of originality (this was no disgrace; for neither was Cicero an original thinker). He knew that if there was much in Christianity to repel the aristocratic and literary classes, there was much also to attract them. There were, however, no writings as yet to appeal to their tastes. The apologists of the third century had been African, had had little of the traditional Roman style to offer, had written for the masses, had used not the finest Latin, and had been wanting in philosophical method. Hence, there was need for a method suited to the age and the classes. Lactantius attempted to supply that need. He wrote pure Ciceronian Latin. He was expert in all its varieties, from the quiet, tranquil philosophical deism of

²⁶ Cf. Eusebius, *Chron. ann.* 2330.

²⁷ Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 18.23.

²⁸ Bardenhewer, *Patrology* p. 203.

²⁹ In spite of the length and the naïveté of much of his arguments, one must admit the evident sincerity of the new convert attempting to convince others.

the *De opificio Dei* to the wild, vigorous, burning accents of the *De mortibus persecutorum*. He knew that the minds he was striving to reach were sensitive to the charm of fine language, and he employed the purest style that circumstances permitted. His vocabulary, his syntax, the artful rounding out of his periods, the careful adherence to the strict rules of the *cursus* for completing his phrases, all were redolent of Cicero. And in spite of his African origin and Christian belief, he was Roman to the core. In this, too, he was the new or Christian Cicero, giving expression to the new or Christian culture. 'As Cicero had done so much to create the moulds of *Romanitas*, so his spirit served to influence if not to dominate the forms of Christian culture by which *Romanitas* was superseded.'³⁰

And after Rome became Christian, or when Constantine gave Christians legal status, and Lactantius had been promoted to the office of tutor to the emperor's son, the Christian orator needed no longer to appeal for mercy. Now he became the emperor's spokesman for the change in policy which would so affect the welfare of the times. In this capacity we see Lactantius in the new empire of Constantine, compared in so many more obvious ways with that of the founder Augustus, fulfilling the role of Vergil and Horace.³¹

As has already been indicated, Lactantius is very sparing in his use of Christian sources. He wrote for those who refused to be impressed by the simple style of the Scriptures. Proofs derived from Scripture implied faith and, therefore, were valid only for Christians. His work abounds in quotations, but these are from classical authors, chiefly Cicero and Vergil. In Brandt's edition, the list of his quotations from classical authors fills twenty pages and quotations from the Bible, four. Stoic and Epicurean sources provided him with material for answers to the problems of evil and the divine wrath. Many of these he quotes; others he uses with but an implied acknowledg-

³⁰ Cf. bibliography, Cochrane, 39.

³¹ Cf. Rand, *Cambridge Ancient History* 8, 609.

ment. He makes generous use of the Sibylline Oracles and also of the Hermes Trismegistus source. An exhaustive study of Lactantius' sources was made by the editors of the text in the Vienna Corpus, Brandt and Laubmann, and is published as a prolegomenon to their text.³²

He makes no reference to Greek Christian authors, and when he speaks of his predecessors in the field of defending the faith, he mentions as 'those who are known to him' (*Inst.* 5.1) only Minucius Felix, Tertullian, and Cyprian. It has already been mentioned that he was very probably unaware of both the conversion to the faith and the apologetic work of his teacher of rhetoric, Arnobius of Sicca.

His great erudition in the field of pagan mythology and false philosophies and his deliberate choice of a method of apologetics which he believed would be effective with the pagan audience have made his works in themselves a good source for ancient culture (fragments of authors that would otherwise have perished are preserved in them); moreover, they are a good introduction to the thought of the chief pagan writers. His evaluation, too, of Greek and Roman thinking on philosophical and religious matters is worth consideration. He knew his sources well; whatever the weaknesses of his defense of the new faith, he was strong in his attack on the shams and false foundations of the old doctrines.

Theologians are in general very severe in their judgment of Lactantius.³³ They have dismissed him as a Christian humanist, with neither originality nor depth. It seems, however, that a restudy of his writings should be made. Even with reference to their doctrinal content, the same indulgence should be shown him that all breakers of new ground claim. We must ever bear in mind the epoch in which he lived and wrote. It was still the age of apologists. The end of the third century

³² CSEL 19, xcii-cix. The indices of authors and sources are in Vol. 27.2.241-278.

³³ Le Nourry says that some critics have judged so harshly of him that scarcely any other writer seems ever to have erred so often in so few writings. Cf. E. S. Ffoulkes in bibliography.

was a time of supreme crisis: established religion joined with philosophic deism to make an end of the common enemy, Christianity. True, Lactantius, a witness to Christianity at the end of pagan society, is quite ignorant of theology because it scarcely existed, especially in Latin. Yet from the apologetic treatments of the new doctrine he attempted to form a synthesis. He was the first in the West to do this, a whole century before Augustine. His work, therefore, must necessarily suffer from the dual defects of an initial effort as well as from his own obvious lack of theological preparation. Since he was a philosopher and a layman who, moreover, was converted late in life, his theology could scarcely have embodied the fullness of the Christian tradition. In fact, although he purposed to present theological treatises, he is first, last, and always an apologist. The apologetic aspects of the theology of the times had certain fundamental questions forced upon its attention by the missionary status of early Christianity. The refutation of false doctrines was one such major concern. In this Lactantius was at his best. Jerome had recognized this. 'If only,' he lamented, 'he could have affirmed our teachings as easily as he destroyed those of other sects!'³⁴

But Lactantius lacked the knowledge and the capacity to handle the theological problems inherent in the subjects he discussed. We must always remember, though, that he was a pioneer, and we have grown perhaps too accustomed to our present-day presentations of doctrine, the precise formulation of which has been gained only through centuries of maturing insight, supported by the infallible apologetic pronouncements and declarations of the Church. His emphasis is moral rather than dogmatic. He is enthusiastic about martyrdom, Christian charity, humility, and chastity, but he hardly mentions the gift of grace (he antedates Augustine!), and while he dwells on the transformation wrought by the new faith, he does not stress the redeeming role of the Savior of mankind. The one central doctrine that permeates all his writing is that of divine prov-

³⁴ Cf. Jerome, *Epistle* 58.10.

idence. It is the quiet theme of his first Christian work, the *De opificio Dei*; it is the exultant paean of the *De mortibus persecutorum*.

The converted rhetor, imbued with strong classical culture, rich in personal reflections on Christian doctrine rather than a sure theological knowledge, and with only a brief acquaintance with Sacred Scripture, was above all a religious philosopher. He attempted an alliance of Christian dogma with his philosophy. In this he laid the foundations for the 'fourth-century renaissance.'³⁵ But in this philosophical strain, too, can be detected the seat of those errors with which he is charged.

The chief points of his doctrine as discussed by scholars³⁶ may be put briefly as follows:

The Trinity. He conceives of the Son's role as cosmological. The Holy Spirit almost disappears from his discussion. St. Jerome testifies³⁷ that he denied, especially in the two books of *Letters to Demetrianus*, now lost, the existence or divine personality of the third member of the Trinity. His identifying Him sometimes with the Father and sometimes with the Son was to some extent due to the lack of precise terminology and understanding on the part of many of the rank and file of early Christians. The great heresies against the Trinity were not yet refuted by the Nicene pronouncements (325), nor was it until 381 that the Council of Constantinople asserted the Godhood of the Holy Spirit as a matter of faith.

Angelology. He assigns special works and powers to the angels, and to the demons as well.³⁸ His is one of the earliest

³⁵ Cf. Paul Allard, 'Lactance et le De mortibus persecutorum,' *Revue des questions historiques*, n. s. Vol. 30 (Paris 1903).

³⁶ Cf. E. Amann, 'Lactance,' DTC 82 (Paris 1925) cols. 2425-2444; H. Lietzmann, 'Laktantius,' RE 12 (1924) 351-356; B. Altaner, *Patrologie* (Freiburg i. B. 1950) 153-157; J. Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 2 (Westminster, Md. 1953) 392-410.

³⁷ Cf. Jerome, *Epistle* 84.7; *Commentary in Gal.* ad 4.6.

³⁸ Cf. E. Schneweis, *Angels and Demons According to Lactantius*, CUA Studies in Christian Antiquity, No. 3 (Washington 1942).

Christian treatments of the subject, and it is much confused with mythological concepts.

Dualism. The devil is considered as an antigod (*Inst.* 2.8, 9), and Lactantius speaks, therefore, of two principles (6.6). The opposition between the two found expression in creation, and continues in the conflict between spirit and flesh, right and wrong, and the ordinary topics of contrariety.

The problem of evil. This is connected with his concept of dualism, which seems to be of Stoic derivation. He sees in the enmity between God and the devil the origin of all morality and immorality. Lactantius shows that the Christian religion restates the affinity of God with man, and he is not ashamed to dwell almost exclusively on the anthropomorphic conception. To an age which revered the unapproachable majesty of God, he proclaimed that He is very near and that His providence is very minute. His purpose in building the world was to put before rational beings the prize of immortality as worth the price of toil and probation. For this He established man with a free will in a world of contraries. Again comes Lactantius' dualism.³⁹ Thus it follows that there can be no virtue unless there be vice, just as there is no light without the possibility of darkness.

Psychology. He holds strongly to the spirituality and immortality of the soul. His originality lies in his forceful affirmation of the *immediate creation* of all souls by God. Tertullian's theory was grosser, and Lactantius differs from Arnobius also on immortality. Arnobius, his teacher, held that the soul was not of itself deathless, but could become so by a Christian life. Lactantius' view is that the soul by nature is immortal. He believes, therefore, that the wicked are not annihilated but are subject to eternal punishment (*Inst.* 2.12) and the souls of the

³⁹ Cf. F. W. Bussell, 'The Purpose of the World-Process and the Problem of Evil as Explained in the Clementine and Lactantian Writings in a System of Subordinate Dualism,' *Studia Biblica et Ecclesiastica* 4 (Oxford 1896) 133-188 (especially 178ff); also Ermin F. Micka, O.F.M., *The Problem of Divine Anger in Arnobius and Lactantius*, CUA Studies in Christian Antiquity, No. 4 (Washington 1943).

saved remain blessed forever because they seek and love the God who is eternal (7.9).

Eschatology. Lactantius makes no advance over his predecessors but is definitely archaistic. In *Institutes* 7 there is a highly chiliastic eschatology. For this he was probably steeped in the apocryphal apocalypses (7.20), but this notion of the ages of the world and the nearness of the end of time was shared by many enlightened men of his own and later days. Lactantius was convinced that there were left only about 200 years. In medieval times, too, men were quite certain of an imminent end of the world. St. Vincent Ferrer, the very popular Dominican preacher of the fourteenth century, was called 'the Angel of the Judgment' because of his insistence upon the proximity of the day of doom.

Despite imperfections in his theology, the writings of Lactantius do not merit the disdain they have received. They gave glory to the reign of Constantine and were accepted eagerly for study and correction by minds like Jerome, Augustine, Prudentius, and Cassiodorus. Through a steady stream they became part of the vast supply of Christian humanism. His apologetics must be judged by the public he addressed. Though much of his demonstration reposes on literary falsification (the Sibylline Oracles and Hermes Trismegistus), he is not the first nor the last to use the method. His performance must be accepted as an honest attempt to approach speculation from the practical point of view. He had a zeal for purity and discipline and strove to make others share his firm convictions. Since charity covers a multitude of sins, the fervor of his purpose must more than make up for his theological defects.

For the present translation the Brandt-Laubmann text in the Vienna Corpus has been used throughout. For the *Deaths of the Persecutors* supplementary use was made of Moreau's text in *Sources chrétiennes* 39. Citations of sources and references to uses made of Lactantius by other writers are also taken from the Brandt-Laubmann text. For the most part these are given as independent translations. No attempt has been

made to use the standard English translation of the ancient authors whom Lactantius quotes. For biblical quotations, as far as it seemed not inconsistent with the Lactantian version, the Confraternity translation was used for the New Testament, the Pentateuch, and the Psalms, and the Challoner revision of the Rheims-Douay translation for the other portions of the Old Testament.

Some portions of the text appear in some manuscripts and not in others. The Brandt-Laubmann text does not incorporate these sections, a discussion of which will be given subsequently,⁴⁰ but provides the readings in the critical apparatus. The most recent authoritative scholarship, however, considers the small group of manuscripts which provide the readings as a valuable tradition. They are the ninth-century *Paris Codex Regius*, 1663, the twelfth-century *Paris*, 1664, and the fourteenth/fifteenth-century *Codex Gothanus I n. 55—R, S, and g* respectively according to the Brandt-Laubmann sigla. In this translation the two panegyrical sections, *Inst.* 1.1.12 (p. 3b) and 7.27.2 (p. 71b), have been included. The short invocations appearing in each of the other books of the *Institutes* have not been included, nor have the two long passages of heavily dualistic content 2.8.6 (p. 130 of the Vienna Corpus text) and 7.5.27 (p. 602). It has seemed wise to omit the material of so disputed a nature; enough attention has been drawn to the dualistic tendencies in the writings of Lactantius. On the other hand, the panegyrical sections have been included as being in full accord with his spirit and policies.

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⁴⁰ Cf. below, pp. 8-10.

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*THE DIVINE
INSTITUTES*

INTRODUCTION



THE PRINCIPAL WORK OF LACTANTIUS, the *Divine Instructions*, might be entitled *An Introduction to the True Religion*. This apology for Christianity, directed to pagan intellectuals or to those recently converted, consists of two parts: the one polemical, which is very short; the other, dogmatic, which considers the substance of the whole system of Christian doctrine. Although at times the work lacks exactness and depth, a study of it is essential for forming an adequate concept of the state of religious thought in the early years of the fourth century. For the historian it offers a wealth of information on the philosophical and religious problems which faced thinkers of the age and it presents arguments for and against Christianity which had weight for cultured men of that time.

In the winter of 302-303 when Diocletian and his Caesar, Galerius, were both at Nicomedia, and when Galerius pressed the necessity for persecution,¹ Diocletian was won over from his policy of resisting him by a circle of Neoplatonist philosophers. Among them was Hierocles,² a man of consular rank, the governor of Bithynia, formerly of Phoenicia, a disciple of Celsus and Porphyry, and a notable antagonist of the Christians. He published two books on *The Discourse of a Lover of Truth Against the Christians*³ in which he was intent on

1 Cf. Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 10, 11, Vol. 2.

2 This Hierocles has been identified by Seeck in an article in *RE* 8 (1913) col. 1477. Cf. Lactantius, *Institutes* 5.2, *De mortibus* 10-11. Arnobius, Eusebius, and Methodius of Olympus all wrote against him. Cf. references *passim*, N. H. Baynes, n. 1 (General Introduction).

3 The title is *Philalethes* or *The Truth-Lover*. Cf. Lactantius, *Institutes* 5.3.23. On the doctrine of Hierocles, cf. P. de Labriolle, *La réaction païenne* (Paris 1942) 306ff.

showing the 'contradictions' in Scripture. Thus, not content in his official capacity with condemning Christians to torture and death, he determined to destroy their beliefs by his writings. So exact was his knowledge of Sacred Scripture, in fact, that Lactantius wondered if he may not have been a Christian.

It was the refutation of the writings of Hierocles and of three books of sophistic attack by another pagan apologist whose name is not known, that may be considered the immediate occasion of the writing of the *Divine Instructions*, commonly called the *Institutes*. At the same time, Lactantius aimed at the refutation of all past and future opponents of Christianity. The work which resulted is the first systematic presentation in Latin of the main teachings of the Christian faith.

On the side of reason the argument consists largely of commonplaces lifted from Cicero and the Stoics. These serve to indicate the affiliations between Christianity and classical idealism as against the materialism of Epicurean thought. In the matter of authority, Lactantius is not unlike Cicero himself in citing texts without discrimination. On the same point he quotes from Sacred Scripture and from pagan poets. He relies heavily on the Sibylline utterances, Hermes Trismegistus, Vergil, Ovid, and other writers, especially Cicero. He seems to share in the as-yet-unexpressed conviction of an Augustine or an Aquinas that wherever truth is to be found it may be considered as a participation in the Divine Truth and, therefore, validly used. From an erroneous first premise, prevalent in the philosophy of his opponents, namely, the separation of reason from faith, Lactantius traces all that vanity of their false philosophy discovered in his examination of it. This is the burden of his first three books. In the next four he undertakes the task of harmonizing the two founts of knowledge, for true wisdom and true religion are one and inseparable. In his defense of the faith, then, Lactantius becomes a champion of human reason as well. This is a distinct contribution to human thought, and a most necessary one.

The apologist has a magnificent thesis, in spite of the looseness of some of his argumentation and the shallowness of some of his thinking. His vindication of reason and faith, of culture and Christianity, was to serve as a *De officiis* for the 'new' commonwealth.⁴ In the new order the *Romanitas* of the ideals of the old will be justified only in its ministry to the superior demands of *humanitas*. One finds herein Christian principles of brotherly love, the law of charity attainable only through accepting the principles of the Fatherhood and absolute mastery of the one God.

The seven books of the *Divine Institutes* may be briefly outlined as follows:

Book I: On the False Worship of the Gods.

Ch. 1. Prefatory remarks on the value of knowledge of the truth and a dedication (to Constantine); the alliance of wisdom and religion.

2-8. The evidence of Providence in the affairs of men and the reasonable arguments that God is one; divine testimonies to this truth; the witnesses of the poets and philosophers.

9-23. The pagan theogonies; an account of the origins, life stories, and evil influences of the traditional and anthropomorphic cults of the Greeks and Romans.

Book II: On the Origin of Error.

Ch. 1. Man's forgetfulness of reasonable worship of God.

2-4. The origin and errors of anthropomorphism.

5-7. The heavenly bodies, the elements, human ancestors, mere creatures of God and not to be worshiped.

8. Auguries and portents.

9-14. The devil, the world and its creatures; intemperate use of material creation as an origin of false religions.

15-18. The angels, their fall, the demons and their arts; the worship of demons.

19. Worship of images.

⁴ Cf. Cochrane (bibliography) 191ff.

20. Transition from previous types of errors to the discussion of philosophy.

Book III: On the False Wisdom of Philosophers.

Ch. 1. A comparison of truth and eloquence, of the simple style of the Scriptures and the external splendor of empty eloquence.

2-6. Philosophy; its contents; some of the chief sects and their tenets of an epistemological nature; Socrates, the Stoics.

7-9. Ethics and some concepts of moral philosophy of some of the ancients; the Stoics, Cyrenaics, the Academy.

10-13. Virtue as the soul's object here for the attaining of immortality, the chief good.

14-16. The teachings of the great philosophers on this point of the origin of wisdom: Lucretius, Seneca, Cicero.

17-25. Epicurus, Leucippus, Democritus, as originators of error; the Pythagoreans and Stoics who upheld immortality but have faulty notions of suicide; Cicero and other very wise men: Socrates, the wisest, and Plato, perhaps the greatest, who propound great truths with a mixture of error or in an unbelieving manner.

26-30. A summarizing discussion on the great powers of divine wisdom, conferred on men by revelation only and which is in no way aided by the precepts of the false philosophers, by nature or by fortune.

Book IV: On True Wisdom and Religion.

Chs. 1-2. The errors of former religions, perpetrated even by the wise; for example, the Seven Sages, Plato, and Pythagoras.

3-5. The identical source of true wisdom and true religion.

6-21. The true idea of divinity brought to men by Christ in the Incarnation; the waiting for the Messiah; His birth, life, death, priesthood, mediatorship, resurrection, ascension; the prophecies of each and their fulfillment; witness of the Old Testament, the Sibyls, and Hermes Trismegistus.

22-30. The objections of the unbelievers; hope and faith; avoidance of heresy and superstition.

Book V: On Justice.

Chs. 1-4. Remarks addressed to the emperor on why the work was published.

5-6. The justice of Saturn's reign and its banishment by Jupiter.

7. The true justice that came with Jesus Christ and its fruit.

8-23. The knowledge of justice by all men but its rejection by most; the sufferings of the Christians at the hands of criminal persecutors; false piety and the weaknesses and foolishness of Christians; their equity and fortitude and patience.

24. Divine vengeance, the act of God's justice.

Book VI: On True Worship.

Chs. 1-8. The two ways of true and false worship, of virtue and vice, truth and error and their rewards.

9-13. The law of God; religion toward God and charitableness toward men, the prerequisites of justice and, therefore, of true worship.

14-19. The passions; the opinions of the Stoics and Peripatetics on the passions; right and wrong use of them.

20-23. The senses and their pleasures; the proper or controlled enjoyment of them.

24-25. Conversion to God; sacrifice and praise; a plea for sincerity of worship.

Book VII: On the Happy Life.

Chs. 1-8. An introduction to the study of eschatology, the nature of the world; its inhabitants; censures of the opinions some have held with reference to the world and the enjoyment of it by creatures; the creation of man and his position in the world.

9-13. The immortality of the soul; rewards and punishments of life and death; union, separation, and return to union of soul and body.

14-27. The end of the world; the proximity of its occurrence; the destruction of empires and chaos; prophecies of such doom in Scripture, the Sibylline Oracles, Hermes, and the poets; the coming of the false prophet, the AntiChrist; the judgment of Christ; the punishment of souls; the Resurrection.

28. A conclusion: the encouragement and confirmation of those who have adored God with true worship; the reward of which will be the vision of Him, even as the penalty of the unrighteous is to be the deprivation of that blessedness.

The writing of the *Divine Institutes* must have been begun about 304, shortly after *The Workmanship of God* to which he made reference (2.10.15) as recently written and not long after the publication of the attacks of Hierocles and the other pagan sophist. Book VI must have been compiled before the Edict of Toleration of Galerius in 311, because the references are to the endurance of present (or very recent) trials and the circumstances of persecution (6.17.18). The two dedications to Constantine (1.1; 7.26), however, certainly imply that the Edict of Milan of 313 had been promulgated. In the first he addresses Constantine as 'the first of Roman princes to repudiate errors and acknowledge and honor the majesty of the one, only, true God.'⁵ In the second he gives thanks that all stress is now at an end 'since the time when God raised you up, most holy Emperor, to restore the house of justice and protect the human race. For, while you rule the Roman state, we, the worshipers of God, are no longer considered as nefarious and impious.'⁶

⁵ This dedicatory statement qualifies Constantine as '*Imperator Maximus*,' a title conferred by the Senate on the morrow of Constantine's victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge. It also supposes that Constantine has been emperor for some time. Still, the persecution is not over throughout the Empire. It raged under Maximin Daia and his government until he was overthrown by Licinius in 313.

⁶ This dedication refers to the benefit to the Christians from Constantine's government. The author of the two dedications is in full accord with the author of the *Panegyric* of 313.

These two dedications to Constantine have been the subject of much scholarly investigation and controversy. For some time, it has been held that they were interpolations⁷ made by Christians who were obsessed with the idea of the glorification of Constantine the Great. At present, the weight of authority favors the authorship of Lactantius.

The question was complicated still more by the fact that these dedications are missing from an entire family of uncial manuscripts, more ancient and generally better than those which present the sections in question. The manuscripts which contain the dedications also contain some short theological discussions on the origin of evil, which are strongly dualistic, almost Manichaean, in tone. The five sections must stand or fall together. Actually, the presence of the unorthodox discussions is a strong plea for their genuineness. They would not have been added by the author himself in a later rendition, for he would have taken note of the errors. Certainly, an editor with Christian formation would not have added them, but it is highly probable that they were removed by an editor. An orthodox admirer would have deleted the dualistic passages as offensive and the panegyric ones as superfluous.⁸ It seems best, therefore, to reject the interpolation theory and to consider these portions as constituting an integral part of the primitive text. Besides, the ideas expressed in these dualistic passages (2.8.6 and 7.5.27, that God intended and created evil) are in full accord with those which Lactantius expounds in other parts of his work: in *The Workmanship of God* 19.8 and throughout *The Wrath of God*.⁹

Together with the two major Constantinian dedications (1.1.12 and 7.27.2) some lesser panegyric sections may be con-

⁷ This interpolation theory was defended by S. Brandt (ed., Vienna text) in 'Ueber die Dualistischen Zusätze und die Kaiseranreden bei Lactantius,' *Sitzungsberichte der Wiener Akademie der Wissenschaften* CXVIII (1889).

⁸ Cf. H. Emonds, 'Zweite Auflage im Altertum,' *Klassische-Philologische Studien* 14 (Leipzig 1941) 55ff.

⁹ Cf. Pichon (bibliography) 13ff.; also H. J. Lawlor, 'Notes on Lactantius,' *Hermathena* 12 (Dublin 1903) 447-469.

sidered: 2.1.2; 3.1.1; 4.1.1; 5.1.1; 6.3.1. If one accepts the most likely solution of the authenticity problem, namely, that the manuscripts which contain the portions in question actually are witness to an earlier text tradition than that of the others, there remains but one further problem. That concerns the matter of dating the dedications and thereby permitting us to fix the dates of the editing of the *Institutes*. It is obvious that Lactantius himself added prefatory sections and transitions, and it is very probable, too, that he attached the panegyrical sections as events warranted him to do so.

Piganiol has provided an acceptable solution for the question of the Constantinian dedications.¹⁰ The first does not mention Licinius, but does speak of a son of Constantine. This Piganiol took as a *terminus post quem*, since the second son was born about 317. And the dedication of Book VII and its allusion to Constantine's victory over the persecutors Piganiol takes as a song of triumph after the defeat of Licinius, rejecting the possibility of reference to Maxentius or Maximin Daia. He, therefore, would date the editing of the *Institutes* between 321 and 323. In spite of what seem like very convincing arguments, it is not possible to place the composition of the *Institutes* during the years of the struggle between Constantine and Licinius. The internal evidence of many sections of the work is too strong against this hypothesis. The work must have been written during the years of persecution, between 305 and 313, since it is a response to the works of such writers as Hierocles which fell into oblivion after the peace of the Church. The dedications, however, would have been added by the author when he published his definitive edition, prepared during the period of his tutorship of Crispus. Perhaps at that time, too, he made an adjustment in his text in order to introduce an allusion to the contemporary status of Licinius.

Book V presents special problems. Parts of it describe the persecution as present; other parts treat of it as past. The composition of the major portion of this book, however, may have

¹⁰ Cf. A. Piganiol, 'Dates constantiniennes,' *Revue Hist. et Philos. Rel.* 12.

occurred earlier than that of the remainder and perhaps of the other books.

Allusions point to this, and an argument from fitness or arrangement can be used as well. It is evident that Lactantius tried to make his books of uniform length. Occasionally, perhaps as a means of transition, he mentions that he has set a gauge for himself, an approximate number of words or chapters, the *mensura libri* of 1.1.13, 6.20.1, and 7.25.1, for example. Note here, too, that the three other works: *The Workmanship of God*, *The Anger of God*, and *The Deaths of the Persecutors*, are of nearly equal size, about two-thirds the length of the books of the *Institutes*.

Book V is the shortest of its series. It consists of two parts which scarcely have anything in common. The first could well be an introduction to the entire work, giving the circumstances which led to his undertaking it (5.2.3); a statement of his aim and purpose (5.1.1-20, 4.1.2); and a criticism of labors of previous apologists (5.1.21-28, 4.3-8). Then follows the discussion on Justice (5-23), the title of Book V. Moreover, the transition to this section is awkward. 'I have wandered farther than I meant to. Now let us go back to the proposed discussion on justice.' These chapters (5-23) form a treatise complete in itself, and in length they are like the other three single-book works. All the passages which point to an early date for this book occur in this part. The hypothesis,¹¹ therefore, is most interesting and highly probable that perhaps around 306, after he left Nicomedia and followed Constantine to Gaul, Lactantius wrote a little tract, *De iustitia*. Some years later, when he reached the point of writing a fifth book for the *Institutes*, he may have made use of the earlier work instead of writing a fresh treatise, and to this he may have affixed the prefatory remarks.

There are features which point to an earlier date for Chapters 5 to 23. It has been noted that there is not much evidence of the usual care and skill in the arrangement of arguments

¹¹ Cf. Lawlor, *op. cit.*

whereon Lactantius shows himself the true Ciceronian. Such criticism Book V can share with his earliest work, *The Workmanship of God*. Perhaps Lactantius himself was conscious of the lack, because the summary in the *Epitome* is changed. Another common element—namely, a proneness to exaggerated statements—is marked in both *The Workmanship of God* and *Institutes* 5.5-23. Still the two are different. The latter is the most outspoken, most anti-pagan portion of his works (save for the pamphlet, *De mortibus*); the former, on the other hand, is the least Christian of Lactantius' extant writings. The *Workmanship* was written in 303 when the Christians were in very great danger, while Book V of the *Institutes* was written around 306 when he was in Gaul and under the protection of Constantine, the Caesar, who had made an Edict of Toleration, or who had at least been showing favor to the Christians from the outset of his official career.¹²

In the *Institutes* Lactantius both interests us and moves us. Here we do not find the rough, bitter, aggressive dialectic of a Tertullian, nor do we meet the sometimes almost despondent language of a Cyprian. There are fine intuitions, the clairvoyance of a delicate soul which feels the truth of Christianity and strives earnestly to make it appeal to the heart. He has a profound sense of the moral efficaciousness of Christianity in a world sadly in need of a moral regeneration and he becomes a stirring preacher of the 'renewing' which it has brought to the soul of mankind. In giving this message the man trained in the schools addresses those of his own world. He will meet the violence of the pagans with the arguments of Christian certainty.

In opposition to the externalism of a religion of cultus and bodily acts, Lactantius can assert that it is not *how* man worships but *what* he worships that really matters. No one up to his time had better seized upon the differences between the two religions (see 4.3.9 and 5.19.29, for example). The one insists upon reform of the will to its doctrines of the father-

¹² Cf. Holsapple (bibliography) 126.

hood and mastery of God. The other consists of rites in which the fingers alone have a part. Because of this intuition, though the major emphasis of his work remained moral, he was able to effect at the very beginning of the fourth century, a real *summa* of the Christian doctrines, containing the cardinal articles of faith: God, Christ, the Incarnation, miracles, the Church, and heresies. In places he reached the real foundation of the spirit of Christianity.

What gives great interest to the study of the *Institutes* is that we find in the work very different tendencies intermingled and confused. For example, his notion of a '*summus deus*' is seemingly a commonplace shared with the pagan philosophers. It is at times almost as if the legitimacy on polytheism were accepted, and that he believed that an evolution had occurred toward the recognition of a *deus primus* or a *deus summus*.¹³ On the other hand, very often he seems to become almost fanatical in his ridicule of pagan cults and even the philosophical concepts of divinity. In some matters he seems to hold on to the legacy of the past and at the same time to give indications of a new spirit.

He is severe, too. He condemned art, perfumes, power, killing (even the death penalty). If God created these objects of his condemnation, it was so that man might exercise restraint. Still, he is not sour or bitter in his asceticism. He has no misgivings on the lawfulness and the good of marriage, on the wisdom of flight during persecution (see 6.20). He is a man of tradition and also of his own times. In the light of this we must interpret his millennialism, his horror of war, his disdain for business. He was aware of the times, that it was the moment when the Church was soon to seal the pact with the Empire. His good sense realized that the system would have to become more supple and give place to moderation, but his traditional rigorism resented the idea. Something of this contradiction remained in all of his theological reasonings in the

13 Cf. Pierre Battifol (bibliography) 196ff.

Institutes. The work was destined, nevertheless, because of its pretensions and the authority of its author, to have influence. In his time it must have aided new converts and strengthened the faith of waverers, and for all time it reflects the spirit of a noble age of Christian apologetics.

BOOK ONE

ON FALSE RELIGION

Chapter 1



WHENEVER MEN OF GREAT AND EXCELLENT character gave themselves completely to a doctrine, they bore whatever labor could be expended in despising all things, even private and public concerns, for the pursuit of searching after truth. It was their belief that to investigate and learn the reason of things human and divine was much more splendid than to cling to the amassing of wealth and the accumulation of honors; for by these things, since they are fragile and earthly and pertain solely to the cultivation of the body, no one can be made better; no one can become more just. Those men truly were most worthy of a knowledge of truth, since they desired to know a thing of such great worth and in such a fashion that they might prefer it to all things—for it is known that certain of them despised their personal concerns and renounced all pleasures in order that naked and unimpeded they might pursue virtue alone and uncloaked. And with them the name and authority of virtue had such great avail that they judged the reward of the highest good to be in virtue itself, but they never arrived at that which they wished. At the same time they spent labor and industry, because truth, that is, the secret of the supreme God who made all things, is not able to be comprehended by [human] ability and its proper senses. Otherwise, there would be no distance between God and man if human thought could attain to the counsels

and dispositions of that eternal majesty. But, since it could not be that the divine plan should become known to man of himself, God did not allow man seeking the light of wisdom to be in error any longer and to wander without any effect of his labor through inextricable darkness. He opened his eyes then and made the knowledge of truth His gift, so that He might show that even human wisdom was nothing, and He pointed out the way of gaining immortality to the erring and wandering one.

Since few, however, make use of this heavenly benefit and gift because truth is hidden, wrapped in obscurity, and it is either despised by the learned because it is in need of suitable defenders or it is hated by the unlearned because of the austerity innate in it, which the nature of men, prone to vice, is not able to endure—for, since bitterness is mingled with virtues, whereas vices are steeped in pleasure, blocked by the former and beguiled by the latter they are borne headlong, and deceived by the appearance of good they embrace evils in place of goods—I thought aid ought to be at hand for these errors, so that the learned might be directed to true wisdom and the unlearned to true religion. And this profession ought to be considered much better, much more useful, more glorious than that oratory in which we engaged for a long time, and in which we instructed youth not toward virtue but plainly toward ‘argued’ evil. Now we will speak with eloquence much more rightly about the heavenly precepts with which we may be able to instruct the minds of men for the worship of the true majesty, for he does not merit so much from human affairs who imparts the science of speaking well as he who teaches to live reverently and innocently. For this reason, philosophers were held in greater glory among the Greeks than orators. For they were considered teachers of living rightly, which is far the more excellent, since to speak well pertains to the few, but to live well to all.

However, that exercise in imaginary lawsuits did much for us that with greater eloquence and ease of speaking we now

might plead the cause of truth.¹ And although this may be defended without eloquence, as it has often been defended by many, it ought to be illustrated and in a certain way asserted by clarity and splendor of speech so that, both equipped with its force and adorned by the light of oratory, it may more potently seep into minds.² And so, for this reason we have arranged this disputation about religion and about divine things. For, if certain of the great orators—veterans, as it were, of their profession—have at last, after completing the phases of their careers, given themselves to philosophy and considered it the most just rest from labors for them; if they tortured their minds in the probing of those things which cannot be discovered, so that they seem to have sought for themselves not so much leisure as its denial and, indeed, to be much more upset than in the occupation in which they had before been engaged; by how much more just a right shall I conduct myself, as if to some very safe port, to that sacred, true, divine wisdom in which all things are ready to say, sweet to hear, easy to understand, and worthy to accept? And if certain prudent men and judges of equity have put forth institutes of civil law which they have composed, by which suits and contentions of disagreeing citizens are quelled, how much better and right for us to set divine institutes in writing, in which we speak not of leaks, or of water to be checked, or of hands to be joined, but of hope, of life, of salvation, of immortality, of God, that we may put to rest deadly superstitions and the basest errors?³

This work we are now beginning under the auspices of your name, Constantine, O greatest of emperors. You are the first of the Roman princes to have repudiated errors and to have

1 Here Lactantius states his firm belief in the necessary and propaedeutic role of pagan learning for Christian scholars. It is appropriately placed in his opening passages of a work in which his intention is the presenting of Christian doctrine to the learned pagan audience in a manner which will be appreciated and understood.

2 Cf. St. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 4.

3 The first address to Constantine, the official dedication of his work, follows here.

come to know and honor the majesty of the one true God. When that most happy of days dawned for the world, the day on which the most high God carried you up to the summit of power, you set forth with a most favorable introduction upon a principedom salutary and desirable to all, when you brought back justice which had been overthrown and taken away and expiated the most foul crime of the other emperors. Because of this, God will grant you happiness, virtue, and length of days, so that, even when you are an old man, you may hold the helm of state with that same justice with which you began to direct it as a young man, and hand over to your children the government of the Roman name which you yourself received from your father.

With the wicked, who are still raging against the just in other parts of the world,⁴ the same omnipotent God will make settlement. He will exact punishment for their crimes so much the more vehemently as it is the more delayed. For just as He is the most indulgent Father toward the just, so He is a most severe judge against the wicked.

In my desire to defend His religion and the divine worship upon whom should I rather call, before whom should I make address, if not him through whom justice and wisdom have been restored to human affairs?

Omitting, then, the authors of this worldly philosophy who offer nothing of certainty, let us advance upon the right way. Indeed, if I thought that these were sufficiently fit to be leaders of living rightly, I myself would follow them, and I would urge others to follow them. But, since they differ among themselves in great disputation and are generally in discord with themselves, it is apparent that their way is not at all direct, since they have marked out individual ways for themselves, each one as he pleased, and they have left great confusion for those seeking truth. But, since truth has been divinely re-

⁴ The persecution was still raging under Maximin Daia in the East.

vealed to us who have received the pledge⁵ of the true religion, since we follow God as our Teacher of wisdom and Leader of truth, we summon all without any discrimination either of sex or of age to heavenly nourishment. For what food is sweeter to the mind than the knowledge of truth?

For spreading this and for explaining it we have planned seven volumes, although it is a matter of so immense and almost infinite toil that if anyone should wish to expand the points and investigate them most completely, such a great supply of material would abound for him that his discussion would meet neither measure nor end of a book. Therefore, we will gather everything together briefly, because those things which we are going to bring forward are so clear and lucid that it seems to be very strange that truth seems so obscure to men, and to those men especially who are commonly reckoned as wise, or because men are simply going to be instructed by us, that is, called back from the error in which they are involved to the straighter way. And if we shall, as I hope, attain this, we will send them to that richest and fullest source of doctrine, by the draining and drinking of which they may settle thirst born of the flesh and extinguish its burning, and everything will be easy for them, ready at hand, and manifest, in a way that they may not be ashamed for the acquiring of wisdom to apply the discipline of reading or the patience of hearing. For many, clinging fast to vain superstitions, grow hard against manifest truth, not so much because of their religions which they spread distortedly, though meriting well, as because of themselves and evilly. Although these possess the right way, they follow devious turnings; they forsake the level places to fall through those that are precipitous; they abandon the light that they may lie blinded and weak in darkness. These ought

⁵ The word is *sacramentum*, one of the most interesting in Christian Latin literature. In classical usage the word was a technical one, with juridical or military significance. In Christian and later use it came to mean 'secret,' 'mystery,' 'doctrine,' and finally 'sacrament.' There is no such theological meaning here. Cf. A. Souter, *Glossary of Later Latin*, and A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens*, s.v. 'sacramentum.'

to try not to fight against themselves and to want to liberate themselves finally from inveterate errors; this they surely will do once they have examined why they have been born. For this is the cause of the perversity, ignorance of the self; if a person shatters this by having come to know the truth, he will know whither his life ought to be directed and how he should spend it. I will briefly put together a summary of this knowledge, since no religion ought to be undertaken without *philosophy*,⁶ nor should any *philosophy* be approved without religion.

Chapter 2

Since the office of explaining the truth has been accepted, I did not think it so necessary to maintain a principle from that question which seems to be primary by nature, whether it is providence which takes care of all things, or whether they have been made and are carried on fortuitously. The author of this opinion is Democritus; its establisher, Epicurus.¹ But even before Protagoras, who called the gods into doubt, and afterwards Diagoras,² who later excluded them, and some others who did not think that the gods existed, what else did they effect except that there was thought to be no providence? However, other philosophers, especially the Stoics,³ very sharply restrained those by teaching that the world could neither have been made without the divine plan, nor stand unless it were ruled by the highest reason. Even Marcus Tullius, although he was a defender of the teaching of the Academics,⁴ dis-

⁶ Lactantius uses the word *sapientia* (wisdom); cf. sources in preceding note.

¹ Epicurus, frg. 368.

² Protagoras of Abdera was one of the earliest and most successful of the Sophists. His is supposed to be the theory that man is the measure of all things. Diagoras, a lyric poet of Melos, flourished c. 466 B.C.

³ The Stoics were a Hellenistic sect which stressed duty and believed in a world soul.

⁴ This name was given to the major school of philosophers claiming descent from Plato. His teaching became associated with the place of the lecture, the Academy in Athens.

coursed much and often about providence as the governor of things, confirming the arguments of the Stoics and adding many new ones of his own; he did this in all the books of his philosophical writing, especially those on the nature of the gods. Nor was it difficult actually to refute the lies of a few men agreeing in perverseness by the testimony of peoples and nations not disagreeing in this one thing. For there is no one so unformed, so untouched by civilized custom, who, when he raises his eyes toward the sky, even though he does not know by the providence of what god all this which he beholds is governed, does not understand that there is something, however, from the very magnitude, motion, arrangement, constancy, utility, beauty, and proportion of nature, and that this could not be possible if it were not for the fact that it is established in a marvelous manner and has been fashioned by some greater plan. And for us, certainly, it is exceedingly easy to follow this side as fully as we please. Since the matter has been much discussed, however, by philosophers, and since those who would do away with providence seem to have been sufficiently answered by artful and eloquent men, and since it is necessary for us to treat of the skill of divine providence in a scattered fashion throughout this work which we have undertaken, let us pass over for the present this question which so coheres to the others that there is nothing which we can discuss that is not at the same time a discussion of providence.

Chapter 3

Let the beginning of our work, therefore, be that consequent topic which follows as a second question: whether the world is ruled by the power of one god or of many? No one who truly has a relish for reason and reflects within himself would think that it is not one who has both established all things and who governs them with that same power with which He

established them. For what need is there of many for sustaining the government of the world? Unless, perhaps, we will think, if there are many, that each single one will have less of strength and power. Actually, this is what they do who maintain that there are many; because it is necessary for them to be weak, inasmuch as each individual one is not able to sustain the governance of such a great mass without the aid of the others. However, God, who is eternal Mind, is by all means in every way perfect and consummate in power. Since this is true, it is necessary that He be one.

Power or absolute excellence retains its own proper strength. This, however, must be considered as complete, from which nothing can withdraw; it is perfect, to which nothing can accrue. Who would doubt that that king is most powerful who has dominion of the whole world? Nor is it without cause; since all things which are everywhere are his, since to him alone all forces are collected from all sides. But, if several should share the world, each certainly will have less wealth and less strength, since each one contains himself within a prescribed portion. In the same manner the gods, if there be many, will be less powerful, some having just so much in themselves, and others having just so much. The nature of power, however, is to be perfect in that in which it resides as a whole, rather than in that in which there is a small part of the whole. God, then, if He is perfect, as He ought to be, cannot be unless He is one, that everything might be in Him. Virtues and powers of gods, therefore, must necessarily be weaker, because as much will be lacking to each one as there will be in the others. Hence, the more there are, so much the lesser will they be.

What of the fact that the greatest power of things and the divine strength cannot be divided even once? Whatever participates in division must of necessity take destruction, also. And, since destruction is far from God, because He is incorruptible and eternal, it follows that the divine power cannot be divided.

God is One, therefore, since it is possible for there to be nothing else which may receive so much power; yet, those who think that there are many gods say that they have shared their functions among themselves. About all of these we will have a discussion in proper places. Meanwhile, I devote myself to that which pertains to the present place. If they have arranged their duties among themselves, the thing is revolved to the same place, that not one of them is able to suffice for all. Therefore, he will not be perfect who is unable, with the others ceasing, to govern all. So it is that for ruling the world there is need of one with perfect power rather than of many with weakness. He who thinks that this so great a magnitude cannot be ruled by One is mistaken; nor does he understand how great is the force and power of the divine majesty, if he believes that the single God who could make the world could not rule the same world which He made. But, if he conceives in his mind how great is the immensity of this divine work, and if he considers that this immensity, although it was nothing before, has been conflated, however, from nothing by the power and plan of God, a work which could not be begun and completed except by One, then he will understand that it is much easier for what has been established by One to be ruled by One.

Perhaps someone may say that a work so immense as that of the world could not even be fashioned unless by many. However many he may make them, however great he may consider them, whatever of magnitude, of power, of strength, and of majesty he should have posited in the many, I confer all this upon One, and I say that it all rests in One, so that there is in Him as much of those things as it is possible neither to say nor to fathom. And since in this matter we fail both in perception and in speech, because the human soul is not capable of such great light of intelligence, and because a mortal tongue is not capable of the explanation of such great things, it is necessary for us to understand and also to explain this very inability.

Again I see what may be said to the contrary, that those several are such as we would have the One. But this can in no way be, because the power of each separate one cannot progress farther than to the powers of the others coming to meet it. It is necessary that each one be not able to transgress its own limits or, if there should have been a transgression, to expel the other from its territory. They who think that there are many gods do not see that it can happen that they might wish for different things, whence an argument and quarrel might arise among them, as Homer has depicted the gods warring among themselves, since some wished Troy to be taken and others opposed it.

So, it is necessary for the world to be governed by the will of One. Unless the power of the separate parts were referred to one providence, the whole itself could not stand, each one having no care beyond what pertains to him properly; just as not even the military system could stand unless it had one leader and ruler. If in one army there were as many generals as there are legions, cohorts, wedges, and wings, in the first place, a battle line could not be drawn up, with each one refusing the danger; nor could it be ruled or restrained easily, since all could make use of their own plans and do more harm than good by their diversity. Thus in this empire of the nature of things, unless there were One to whom the care of the sum of all were referred, all things would be destroyed and fall to pieces.

Moreover, to say that the world is governed by the rule of many is comparable to someone's saying that there are many minds in one body; since there are many and varied functions of the members, in order that separate minds may be believed to rule the separate senses of the body. Likewise, there are many affections whereby we are accustomed to be moved either to anger or to desire or to joy or to fear or to pity, that just as many minds may be thought to operate in all of these. Certainly, if anyone should say this, he would seem to have not even that [mind] which is one. But if in one body of such

great component parts one mind possesses control and is intent upon all the operations at the same time, why should anyone think that the world could not be ruled by one, that it could be ruled by several? And because those advocates of the gods understand this, they so claim that they are in charge of the separate parts that there may be one outstanding ruler. Now, then, the others will not be gods, but satellites and ministers whom that one, the greatest and most powerful of all, shall have put in charge of those duties that they may serve his command and his approvals. If all are not equal, they are not, therefore, all gods, for it is not possible for that which obeys and that which rules to be the one same thing. If God is the name of supreme power, He ought to be incorruptible, perfect, impassible, subject to nothing. So they are not gods whom necessity forces to obey the one greatest God. Since they who think thus are deceived not without reason, we will reveal the cause of this error a little later. Now we will prove the unity of divine power by testimonies.

Chapter 4

The prophets, who in former times were many, preached one God; they declared the One, indeed, those who, filled with the spirit of the one God, uttered things that were to be with equal and agreeable voice. Still, those who have no part with truth do not think that these ought to be believed; they say that those voices were not divine but human. Of course, since they were making a heralding about the one God, they were either insane or deceitful. But we see that their prophecies have been fulfilled or are being fulfilled daily, and divination, harmonizing into one thought, shows that they were not mad. For who of disturbed mind would be able to not only foretell future things, but even utter coherent things? Were they deceitful, then, who uttered such things? What would be so far removed from them as the technique of deceiving, since they

restrained others from every fraud? They were sent by God for this reason, that they might be both heralds of His majesty and correctors of human distortion. Besides, the desire of feigning and lying belongs to those who seek wealth, who desire gains—something far removed from those holy men. For they so performed the duty delegated to them that they labored bereft of all things necessary for the safeguarding of life, not only in regard to the future, but even as far as the present was concerned, being content with the food that should exist at the moment, food which God had supplied. And these had not only no gain, but actually torture and death. The precepts of justice are bitter to the vicious and those who live evilly. And so they whose sins were rebuked and forbidden killed them after they had tortured them most cruelly. Therefore, from those from whom the desire of gain was absent there was absent, also, the desire and cause of deceit. What of the fact that some of them were leaders or even kings, upon whom suspicion of cupidity and evil cannot fall, yet through inspiration they made the proclamation of the single God the same as the others?¹

Chapter 5

But let us pass by forthwith the testimonies of the prophets, lest the proof should seem to be not appropriate, since it is from those who are not credited anyway. Let us come to the writers, and let us cite as witnesses to the proof of the truth the very same writers whom they are accustomed to use against us—I speak of the poets and the philosophers. From these it is necessary that we prove one God, not because they have possessed a knowledge of the truth, but because the power of truth itself is so great that no one can be so blind but that he sees the divine brightness directing or inspiring him with lights. The poets, therefore, even though they honored the

¹ The allusion is to David and Solomon, who are acclaimed as Israel's greatest leaders, even from a purely secular standpoint.

gods with their songs and extolled their exploits with the highest praises, confessed very often, nonetheless, that all things were contained and ruled by one spirit or mind. Orpheus,¹ who is the oldest of the poets and an equal of the gods themselves, since it is handed down that he sailed among the Argonauts with the Sons of Tyndarus² and Hercules, calls the true and great god 'the first-born,' because before him nothing was made, but by him all things are generated. He names this same one 'the Appearer,' because, when there was as yet nothing, he first appeared and arose from infinity. And since he was not able to conceive of his origin and nature in his mind, he said that he was born of the immense air: 'The first-born, Phaethon, son of the extended air,' for he did not have anything more which he could say. This one, he says, is the parent of all the gods, for whose sake he established the heavens and looked ahead for their children so that they would have a common dwelling place and abode: 'He built for mortals an imperishable home.'³ So, with nature and reason as guides, he understood that power to be most pre-eminent, the establisher of heaven and earth. He was not able to say that Jove was the principle of all things, who was begotten of Saturn, nor Saturn himself who was regarded as born of the sky; he did not dare, though, to constitute the sky as though the first god, because he saw it to be an element of the world, which itself lacked an author. This reasoning led him to that prime-begotten god to whom he assigned and attributed principality.

Homer could give us nothing which pertains to the truth; he described human things rather than divine. Hesiod could, who encompassed the generation of the gods in the work of one book, but he gave nothing, nonetheless, taking his 'beginning of things' not from a god-establisher, but from chaos, which is

1 Orpheus, the founder of Orphism, is generally believed to have been a Thracian. His fame is due to the poems in which the Orphic doctrines are set forth; cf. fragments 57 and 75 of *Orphica*, ed. E. Abel (1885). This work is superseded by *Fragmenta Orphicorum*, ed. O. Kern (1922).

2 Castor and Pollux, the Dioscuri. Their cult among the Romans was an ancient one.

3 Cf. Kern, *op. cit.*

a confused mass of rude and formless matter. He ought to have explained before chaos itself, whence, when, how it had begun to be or to be determined.⁴ Just as all things have been disposed, arranged, and produced by some artificer, so it is certainly necessary for the very matter to have been made by someone. Who, then, made this but God to whose power all things are subject? But that writer avoided this conclusion while he shuddered at unlearned truth. He did not pour forth that song on Helicon by the inspiration of the Muses, as he wished it to seem; it came after he had meditated and prepared for it.

Maro, the foremost of our own poets, was not far from the truth; his words about the supreme God whom he named "Mind and Spirit" are these:

Know first, the heaven, the earth, the main,
The moon's pale orb, the starry train,
Are nourished by a Soul
A Spirit, whose celestial flame
Glows in each member of the frame,
And stirs the mighty whole.⁵

and lest anyone should be unaware, perhaps as to who the 'Spirit' was who had so much power, in another place he said: 'For the Deity pervades all lands, the tracts of sea and depth of heaven; the flocks, the birds and men, and all the race of beasts, each at its birth derive their slender lives from Him.'⁶

Ovid, too, at the beginning of an exceptional work acknowledges without any dissimulation that the world was fashioned by God, whom he calls 'the Maker of the world, the Artisan of things.'⁷ And if Orpheus or these poets of ours had defended what they felt under the direction of nature constantly, they would have held the same doctrine which we follow with the comprehension of truth.

4 Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony*, 116 1.22.35.

5 Cf. Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.724-727; Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei* 1.1.4; Isidore, *Origines* 8.16.9.

6 Vergil, *Georgics* 4.221-224.

7 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.57-79.

But so much for the poets. Let us come to the philosophers, whose authority is weightier and judgment more certain, since they are believed to have applied themselves not to imaginary matters but to the investigation of truth. Thales of Miletus, who was one of the Seven Sages and who is considered the first of all to have inquired into natural causes, said that it was water from which all things were born, but that God was the mind which formed everything from water.⁸ Thus he posited the matter of things in moisture, but he established the principle and cause of their coming to be in God.

Pythagoras⁹ thus defined what God is: the mind diffused through all the parts of the world and visiting every nature from which all the living things which are born take life.

Anaxagoras¹⁰ says that God is an infinite mind which is moved of itself alone. Antisthenes¹¹ says that there are many popular gods, indeed, but that there is only one natural One, that is, the Artificer of the entire whole. Cleanthes and Anaximenes¹² say that air is the supreme God to whose opinion our poet Vergil gives assent: 'Then air, the omnipotent father, with fecund rains descended into the bosom of the joyful spouse and the great one mixed with the great body nourishes all offspring.'¹³

Chrysippus¹⁴ holds that God is 'natural Force' endowed with divine reason; sometimes he holds that He is 'divine

8 Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.10.25. Thales of Miletus (c. 624 B.C.) was the founder of the first Greek school of philosophy.

9 Cf. Cicero, *ibid.* 11.27; also Salvian, 1.1.2. Pythagoras, born at Samos (c. 580 B.C.), taught the transmigration of souls and discovered important numerical relations.

10 *Ibid.* 11.26. Anaxagoras, an Ionian of the sixth century B.C., taught that there was a supreme directing Intelligence over all things.

11 *Ibid.* 13.32. Antisthenes, a pupil and friend of Socrates, founded the Cynic school of philosophy at Athens.

12 *Ibid.* 14.37, 10.26. Cleanthes succeeded Zeno as head of the Stoics (who flourished from 330 to 231 B.C.); Anaximenes was of the school of Miletus in the sixth century B.C.

13 *Georgics* 2.325-327.

14 Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.15.39. Chrysippus was another immediate successor of Zeno in the Stoic school.

Necessity'; Zeno¹⁵ also holds that He is 'divine and natural Law.' Although the opinion of all these is uncertain, it tends, nevertheless, to the same point: namely, that they agree that Providence is one. For, whether it be nature, or air, or reason or mind, or fatal necessity, or divine law, or whatever else you might term it, it is the same thing as that which we call God. Nor does any diversity of names stand in the way, since all things are revolved to one by that very signification.

Aristotle,¹⁶ although he disagrees with himself and may both declare and affirm things contradictory to themselves, on the whole testifies that there is one mind in charge of the universe.

Plato,¹⁷ who is judged the wisest of them all, plainly and clearly defends a *monarchia*, and he does not name it 'air' or 'reason' or 'nature,' but he names it, as it is, God. By Him this perfect and wonderful world has been fashioned. Cicero, following him and imitating him in many works, frequently acknowledges a god, and calls Him 'supreme' in those books which he wrote on laws.¹⁸ He argues that the world is governed by him, when he discourses on the nature of the gods in this way: 'Nothing is more excellent than God. By Him, therefore, it is necessary that the world be ruled. To no nature, then, is God obedient or subject. He Himself governs every nature.' Now, what this God is he defines in the *Consolatio*: 'Nor, indeed, can God Himself whom we understand be understood in another manner, unless the mind were loose, as one might say, and freed, segregated from all mortal substance, observing and moving all things.'¹⁹

Annaeus Seneca, also, who of the Romans, at any rate, was the keenest Stoic, often speaks of the highest God with meet

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 1.14.36. Zeno, regarded as a Phoenician, founded the Stoic school and became the inspiration for many thinkers of Graeco-Roman times.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 13.33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 12.30. Plato was supreme among ancient thinkers during the early stages of Christianity. At the time of Lactantius, there was the full flowering of the Neo-Platonic teachings of Porphyry. The *Institutes* have been compared with the latter's work.

¹⁸ Cf. Cicero, *De legibus* 1.7.22.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 2.30.77; cf. also Salvian 1.1.3,4.

praise! When he was discoursing on untimely death, he said: 'Do you not understand the authority and majesty of your judge, ruler of the world and of heaven, God of all the gods, from whom those very powers which we adore and cherish singly are suspended?'²⁰ And in the *Exhortations* he similarly says: 'When he combined the first fundamentals of the most beautiful mass, and arranged this, than which nature knew nothing greater, nothing better, so that all things might be with their own leaders, although He Himself had extended Himself through the whole body, however God begot ministers of His power.'²¹ And how many other things, similar to our way of thinking, he uttered about God! I am postponing them now because they are more suitable for other sections. It now is sufficient to show that men of the highest genius have touched upon truth and have almost possessed it, except that custom, smeared with evil opinions, has twisted and seized them, whereby they believed that there also were other gods, and those things which God made for the use of man, as though they had been endowed with sense, they believed should be regarded and worshiped as gods.

Chapter 6

Now let us pass on to the divine testimonies. First I will bring forth one which is like the divine, both because of its very great antiquity, and because he whom I will mention has been raised among the gods. In Cicero, Gaius Cotta,¹ the pontifex, disputing with the Stoics on religious points and on the variety of opinions which they usually have about the gods, in order, after the custom of the Academicians, to make

²⁰ Cf. Seneca, *Consolatio* frg. 13; cf. also Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.27.66; Isidore, *Origines* 8.6.19.

²¹ Cf. Seneca, frg. 26.16. Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 B.C.-A.D. 65) was the mentor of Nero's early days.

¹ A great orator in Cicero's *De natura deorum* and *De oratore* who served as consul in 75 B.C. and later as proconsul in Gaul.

all things uncertain, says that there are five Mercuries. After having numbered four in order, he shows that 'the fifth was that one by whom Argus was slain and for that reason he had escaped into Egypt and had bestowed laws and letters upon the Egyptians. The Egyptians call him "Thoyth," from whom the first month of their year, September, received its name.'² This is he who founded the town which even now is called in Greek the 'city of Mercury,' and the Pheneatans cherish him in a religious manner. And even though he was a man, he was most ancient and well instructed in every kind of learning—to such a degree that his knowledge of the arts and of all other things gave to him the cognomen or epithet Trismegistus.³ He wrote books—many, indeed, pertaining to the knowledge of divine things—in which he vouches for the majesty of the supreme and single God and he calls Him by the same names which we use: Lord and Father.⁴ Lest anyone should seek His name, he says that He is 'without a name,' since He does not need the proper signification of a name because of His very unity, so to speak. These words are his: 'the one God,' 'the One not needing a name,' 'He is the One without a name.' God, therefore, has no name because He is the only one,⁵ and there is no need of particular designation except when a multitude requires distinction so that you may designate each one character by his own mark and appellation. For God, though, because He is always one, the proper name is God.

It remains to present the testimonies of the oracles and the sacred verses, which are much more specific. Perhaps those against whom we are taking this stand think that poets and philosophers, as though fashioning vain deceits, should not be believed because they could be mistaken and because they were men themselves. Marcus Varro—and there was no one among the Greeks more learned than he—when he spoke about the *quindecimviri* in *Divine Things*, which he wrote to Caius

2 Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.22.56; Isidore, *Origines* 5.1.2.

3 Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.49.

4 Cf. Pseudo-Apuleius, *Asclepius* 20.

5 Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 18.9,10.

Caesar, says: 'The Sibylline Books were not the work of one Sibyl, but are called by the name, Sibylline, because all women seers of the Sibyl have been called by the ancients, either from the name of the one at Delphi, or from the announcing of the counsels of the gods.'⁶ In the Aeolic dialect they say *sious* for gods, not *theous*, and counsel is not *boulēn* but *boulān*. So it has been said to be *Sibylla*, as though *theoboule*. And there have been ten Sibyls, and he has enumerated these under the authors who have written about each one. The first was of the Persae; Nicanor makes mention of her, he who wrote the exploits of Alexander of Macedon. The second was the Libyssan, whom Euripides recalled in the prologue to *Lamia*. The third was the Delphic, of whom Chrysippus speaks in that book which he composed on divination. The fourth was the Cimmerian Sibyl in Italy, whom Naevius in the books on the Punic War and Piso in his *Annals* mention. The Erythraean is the fifth, and Apollodorus of Erythraea affirms that she was its citizen and that she had prophesied to Greeks seeking Ilium both that Troy would perish and that Homer would write falsehoods. The sixth is the Samian Sibyl, of whom Eratosthenes records that he had found written mention in the ancient annals of the Samians. The seventh, the Cumaean, by name Amalthea (called by others Heraphile or Demophile), is she who brought the nine books to King Tarquinius Priscus. She demanded for them 300 *philippeï*, and when the king, spurning the high price, ridiculed the woman's madness, she burned three books in his sight and demanded the same price for the remaining ones. Tarquin thought the woman was becoming more and more insane. Finally, when she persevered in her demand for the same price after three others had been destroyed, the king relented and bought the three that were left for the 300 gold pieces. Their number was afterwards increased, when the Capitol was rebuilt, because from all the cities both Italic and Greek, especially the Erythraean ones,

⁶ Cf. St. Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum* 1; Isidore, *Origines* 8.18; St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 13.23.

whatever existed in relation to the name of any Sibyl was collected and brought to Rome. The eighth was the Hellespontian, born in Troy, in the village of Marmessos near the town of Gergithium, who, Heraclides of Pontus writes, lived in the time of Solon and Cyrus. The ninth was a Phrygian who prophesied at Ancyra. The tenth, Albunea by name, was the Tiburtine who is revered at Tibur as a goddess, near the banks of the river Anienis, in whose depths her image is said to have been found, holding a book in her hand.⁷

The songs of all of these Sibyls are reported to be and are regarded to be (especially those of the Cumean Sibyl, whose books are hidden from the Romans and may not be beheld by anyone except the quindecimvirs), and, in fact, are the individual books of individual seers. These, because they are inscribed with the name Sibyl, are believed to be the utterance of one; they are confused and not distinct, and it is impossible to assign individuality, except to the Erythraean one who has inserted her own real name in her song and has declared that she is to be called Erythraea—although she came from Babylon.⁸ We, too, say 'Sibyl' without distinction, wherever we have to make use of their testimonies.

All these Sibyls, however, proclaim one God. This is especially so of the Erythraean one, who is held to be more renowned and more noble than the others. That very careful writer, Fenestella,⁹ speaking about the quindecimvirs, says that 'when the Capitol was restored, Gaius Curio, the consul, made a motion to the Senate that envoys be sent to Erythras to bring back to Rome the songs of the Sibyl gained by conquest. P. Gabinius, M. Otacilius, and L. Valerius were, therefore, sent out and brought to Rome about a thousand verses written down by private citizens.' We have shown above that Varro

⁷ This section of Lactantius is one of the earliest sources on the whole question of the Sibyls. Cf. also St. Augustine's treatment in the *City of God* and *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, s.v. Sibyl, Cumaea, etc.

⁸ *Oracula Sibylla* 3.808-813.

⁹ A Roman historical writer, whose *Annales* had a high reputation as authoritative and documentary; he died in A.D. 20.

said the same. Among these verses which the ambassadors brought to Rome are these testimonies about one God: 'The one God, who alone rules, exceedingly great, unbegotten.'¹⁰ This is the one supreme God who made the sky and marked it with lights: 'But God alone, the one ruler of all, who has made the sky, the sun, and the stars, the metal-bearing earth, and waves of the water of the sea.'¹¹ Since He alone is the Maker of the world and the Fashioner of its parts, both those on whom it rests or which are in it, this provides testimony that He alone ought to be worshiped. 'Himself alone is the one being to be worshiped, He who is the only everlasting One and established from eternity.'¹²

Another Sibyl, whichever one it is, when she stated that she bore the voice of God to men, said this: 'For I am the one only God, and there is no other.'¹³

Now, I would follow out the testimonies of the others if these were not sufficient and if I were not saving them for more opportune sections. But, since we are defending the cause of truth among those who in their aberrations from the truth serve false religions, what kind of proof against them should we apply rather than that we vanquish them with the testimonies of their own gods?

Chapter 7

Apollo, whom they consider more divine than the others and especially oracular, when residing at Colophon, where I believe he had migrated from Delphi, drawn by the delightfulness of Asia, to someone inquiring who or what 'God' was, made answer in twenty-one verses, beginning: 'Self-produced, untaught, without a mother, unshaken, a name not even to be

¹⁰ Frg. 1.7; cf. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 112C.

¹¹ Frg. 2.3ff.; cf. *ibid.* 113B.

¹² Frg. 1.15,16; cf. *ibid.* 112D.

¹³ Frg. 7.377.

comprised in word, dwelling in fire—this is God; and we his messengers are a slight portion of God.¹

Who can imagine that this is said of Jupiter, who had both a mother and a name? What of the fact that that Mercurius Termaximus, whom I mentioned above, not only calls God ‘*amētorā*’ [without a mother], as Apollo does, but even calls him ‘*apatorā*’ [without a father], because there is no origin of any kind for him? For He cannot have been generated from anyone who Himself has generated everything.

I have explained sufficiently, I believe, by proofs and have strengthened by testimonies that which is clear enough of itself, that there is one ruler of the world: one Father, one Lord-God. But perhaps someone may ask us that very same thing which Cicero’s Hortensius asks: ‘If god is one only, what solitude can be blessed?’² as though we, because we say that God is one, should say that He is deserted and solitary. He has ministers, of course, whom we call angels. And it is true, as I related above, and which Seneca has said in his *Exhortations*, that ‘God had produced ministers of His power.’³ Now, these are neither gods, nor do they wish to be called or to be worshiped [as gods], inasmuch as they do nothing except the command of God. Nor, however, are they those who are commonly worshiped as gods, the number of whom is both slight and definite, but if those worshipers of god think that they are worshiping those very same beings whom we call the ministers, there is no cause why they should hold envy toward us who say that there is one God and deny many. If a multitude delights them, we do not say that these are twelve or 365, as Orpheus did,⁴ but we say that they are innumerable. We disclose their errors in a different way, those who would make their gods so few. Let them discover, however, by what name they ought to be called, lest they violate the true God whose name they set forth while they attribute it to several.

1 *Aglaopha* (ed. Lobeck) 1.458.

2 Cicero, frg. 30.

3 Seneca, frg. 26.

4 Cf. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 117E; Lobeck, *op. cit.* 1.364.

Let them have faith in their own Apollo, who by that same response whereby he took away the chief power from Jupiter, also took away from the other gods their name. His third verse shows that the ministers of God ought not to be called gods, but angels. Of himself, indeed, he lied, because, although he was one of the *daimons*,⁵ he included himself among the angels of God. Then, in other responses, he acknowledged that he was a demon. For, when he was asked how he wished to be besought, he answered: 'O, all-wise one, all-learned, versed in many skills, hear, O demon.' At another time, when upon request he uttered an imprecation against the Sminthian Apollo, he began with this verse: 'O harmony of the world, light-bearer, all-wise demon.' What, then, remains, except that by his own confession he lies subject to the stripes and punishment of the true and everlasting God? For, in still another response he has spoken thus: 'The demons who go about the earth and about the sea without weariness are subdued beneath the divine scourge.'⁶

We will discuss both kinds in Book 2.⁷ In the meantime, it is enough for us that, while he wishes to honor himself and place himself in heaven, he has declared, that which the matter at hand holds, how they ought to be called who always stand before God.

Let men, then, recall themselves from errors, and when these depraved religions have been cast aside, let them recognize their Father and Lord, whose strength cannot be gauged, whose magnitude cannot be perceived, whose beginning cannot be comprehended. When to Him the intention and acumen and memory of the human mind shall have advanced, all ways, as it were, reduced and consumed, it stops, it holds fast, it is eclipsed, and there is nothing farther to which it can advance. But, because it is not possible for anything to become except

⁵ Plutarch discusses *daimona* in his *Moralia*; they were powers or indwelling spirits, originally associated with the gods, and later used to refer to man's fate or guiding spirit.

⁶ These are Delphic responses; cf. Lobeck, *op. cit.*

⁷ Cf. below, 2.14-16.

that which at sometime began to exist, it is a consequence that, since there was nothing before Him, He Himself was produced of Himself before all things; and, therefore, He is called by Apollo 'autophuēs,' by the Sibyl 'autogenēs' and 'agenētos' and 'apoiētos.'⁸ Seneca, a clever man, saw this in the *Exhortations*. 'We,' he said, 'are dependent on someone else. Therefore we look to someone to whom we owe what is best in us. Another brought us into being, another instructed us: God Himself made Himself.'⁹

Chapter 8

By these testimonies, therefore, so many and so significant, there is proof that the world is governed by the power and providence of one God, and 'His strength and majesty are so great,' Plato says in the *Timaeus*, 'that no one can either conceive of it in his mind or express it in words, since the power is so exceeding and inestimable.'¹ Now, may anyone question whether anything is difficult or impossible to a God who has devised such great and such magnificent works in His providence, who has established them by His strength, who has perfected them in plan, who even now, moreover, sustains them by His spirit and governs them by His power, who is unfathomable, ineffable and sufficiently known to no one other than Himself? Whence, when thinking and meditating so often about such great majesty, those people who cultivate gods sometimes appear to me to be so blind, so unreasonable, so senseless, so little different from the dumb animals in imagining that those born of the union of a man and a woman could have possessed something of majesty and divine strength, since the Erythraean Sibyl says: 'It is not possible for a god to be

⁸ The power or effect of the Greek cannot be secured in translation: 'self-produced, self-begotten, unbegotten, unmade.' This section is a beautiful expression of sound philosophical and theological principles.

⁹ Seneca, frg. 15.

¹ Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 6.19.14; cf. Plato, *Timaeus*.

fashioned from the parts of a man and a woman.² And if this is true—as it is—then it is clear that Hercules, Apollo, Liber, Mercury, and Jupiter himself were men like the rest, since they were born of the two sexes. But what, indeed, is so far removed from God as that work which He Himself assigned to mortals for the propagation of offspring, and which, without corporal substance, cannot exist at all?

If the gods, therefore, are immortal and eternal, what need have they of another sex? That they might have offspring, I suppose. What need have they, even, of offspring, since those who are always going to be do not need any succession? For, certainly in men and in other animals, the diversity of sex and coition and generation have no reason other than that all species of living things (since by the condition of their mortality they will perish) may be preserved by succession in turn. But for God, who is everlasting, neither sex nor succession is necessary.

Someone will say that this is so ‘in order that He may have ministers or those over whom He may exert sway!’ But what need is there of the female sex, since God, who is omnipotent, as He is called, can procreate sons without the employment and operation of woman? For, if He has granted this to certain tiny animals, that ‘They should gather offspring for themselves with their mouths from leaves and sweet herbs,’³ why should anyone think that God Himself could not beget offspring except through union with another sex? No one is so lacking in awareness but that he knows that those whom the unskilled and foolish consider and adore as gods were mortals. ‘How then,’ someone will say, ‘were they believed to be gods?’ No doubt because they were very great kings and extremely powerful; and because of the merits of their virtues or gifts or the arts they discovered, since they were dear to those whom they ruled, they were enshrined in memory. If anyone doubts

² Frg. 2.1.2; Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 113B.

³ Vergil, *Georgics* 4.200,201.

this, let him consider their exploits and the things they did; all these both the poets and historians of old have handed down.

Chapter 9

Hercules, who because of his strength is regarded as the most famous and as a sort of Africanus among the gods, has befouled with outrages, adulteries, and lusts (has he not?) the whole earth which he is said to have passed through and cleansed. This is not surprising, since he was born of the adultery of Alcmena.¹ What traces of divine nature could there have been in one who, himself enslaved by his own vices, marred males and females alike with infamy, corruption, and disregard of all laws? Certainly the deeds which he performed should not be judged great and marvelous, so that they would seem to be attributed to divine powers. Why is it so magnificent if he overcame a lion and a boar, if he shot birds with arrows, if he removed a royal stable, if he conquered a virago and took away her belt, if he killed wild horses along with their master? They are deeds of a strong man, but still of a man. Whatever he overcame was fragile and mortal. 'For there is no power so great,' as the orator says, 'which cannot be weakened and broken by iron and strength. To conquer the spirit and to restrain wrath are the marks of the most strong. These he did not do, nor could he ever. I do not compare the one who does these with the greatest men; I judge him very much like a god.'²

I would wish that he had added instances of his lust, luxury, desire, and insolence, so that he might complete the excellence of him whom he judged like a god. Surely, he who subdues a lion is not to be considered stronger than he who subdues

¹ Zeus had disguised himself as Amphytrion when he defiled Alcmena, the mother of Hercules.

² Cicero, *Pro Marcello* 3.8.

anger, the wild beast shut up within himself; nor is he who has felled the most rapacious birds stronger than he who curbs the most avid desires; nor he who conquers the warrior-Amazon than he who conquers lust which vanquishes shame and fame; nor he who has cleaned the filth from a stable than he who has driven vices out of his heart, which are the more pernicious because they are one's own peculiar evils, rather than those which could be escaped from or avoided.³ From this we conclude that that man alone ought to be judged strong who is temperate and controlled and just.

If anyone considers what are the works of God, he will regard as ridiculous all these things which the silliest of men marvel at. Those things are measured not by divine powers, of which they are ignorant, but by the weakness of their own resources. No one has denied the point that Hercules was a servant, not only of Eurystheus, a king, which may seem honorable to a certain extent, but also to an unchaste woman, Omphala, who used to bid him sit at her feet, clothed in her garments, performing appointed tasks. Detestable baseness! But pleasure was considered of value. 'What,' someone will say, 'do you think that you should believe in the poets?' Why should I not think so? For it is not Lucilius who relates such things, or Lucian, who has not spared gods and men, but those poets who sang the praises of the gods most powerfully. Whom shall we believe, if we do not have faith in those who praise them? Let him who thinks that these lie present other authors whom we may believe, who may teach us who these gods are, how they are gods, whence they have sprung, what their force is, what their number, what their power, what is admirable in them, what worthy of devotion, what mystery—in short, what is more certain and more true. He will give none. Therefore, let us believe those who have spoken, not that they might blame, but that they might praise. So he sailed with the Argonauts, and he stormed Troy, enraged at Laomedon because he had been denied a reward from the latter for his daughter's

³ Cf. Pseudo-Seneca, *De moribus* 81; *Proverbia* 49.

safety. From this the time that he lived is apparent. Excited by rage and madness, this same figure slew his wife together with his children—and men think him a god! Philoctetes, his heir, did not think so, indeed, for he placed a torch under him as he was about to be burned, and he saw his limbs and sinews seared and scattered. He buried his bones and ashes on the Oetean Mount, and for this service he received his arrows.

Chapter 10

Take Aesculapius, too, himself born of Apollo, but not without disgrace. What else worthy of divine honors did he do except that he healed Hippolytus? He certainly achieved a rather famous death, because he merited to be struck by a god's lightning. In his *Famous Men*, Tarquitiuus, discussing him, says that he was 'born of uncertain parents, exposed and found by hunters, nourished on dog's milk, and given to Chiron, that he learned medicine, and, although he was a Messenian, dwelt at Epidarus.'¹ Cicero also adds that he was buried at Cynosurae.

What about his father, Apollo? Was it not because of a passion which inflamed him that he most shamefully pastured the flock of another and constructed walls for Laomedon, led on by a reward which could have been refused with impunity?² And did not the perfidious king learn from him first how to deny what he had pledged with the gods? The same Apollo, while he was in love with a beautiful boy, violated him, and killed him while he played.

Mars was a homicide, and, freed from the charge of murder by the favoring Athenians, so as not to seem too wild and fierce, he committed adultery with Venus. Castor and Pollux, while they were carrying off the wives of others, ceased to be twin brothers, for Idas, infuriated by the pain of the injury, killed

¹ Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.22.57.

² Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 6.23.5; Tertullian, *Apologia* 14.

one of the two with a sword. The poets relate that they live and die alternately and that they are now, not only the most wretched of the gods, but also of all mortals, for they are not permitted to die but once. Homer, however, differing from the tradition of the other poets, simply states that they both died. For, when he sat Helen beside Priam on the walls of Troy, she recognized all the chiefs of Greece, but she was seeking only for her brothers. And to her speech he added this verse: 'Thus she spoke, but their land held them fast in burial.'³

What did Mercury, a thief and scamp, ever leave for his fame except the memory of his frauds? He is worthy of heaven, I suppose, because he taught wrestling and first discovered the lyre!

It is necessary for Father Liber to be of highest authority and foremost opinion in the senate of the gods, because he alone of all, except Jupiter, triumphed, led an army, and warred against the Indians! But that Indian commander, their greatest and unconquered, was conquered most shamefully by lust and passion. Borne to Crete 'with his retinue of semi-men,'⁴ he found on the shore an unchaste woman, and in the confidence of his Indian victory he wished to be a man, lest he seem too effeminate, and so he took to himself in wedlock that betrayer of her father, slayer of her brother, who had been abandoned and repudiated by another. He made her Libera and ascended together with her into the sky.

What about the father of all these, Jupiter, who in solemn prayer formula is called *Optimus* [best] and *Maximus* [greatest]? Is he not discovered as impious and almost a parricide from his early childhood, since he expelled his father from his kingdom, put him to flight, and did not wait for the death of the decrepit old man in his eagerness to secure the reign? And when he had taken the throne of his father through force of arms, he was harassed by war with the Titans, which was the beginning of evils for the human race. When these

³ Homer, *Iliad* 3.243.

⁴ Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.215.

were overcome and lasting peace was arranged, he spent the rest of his life in debauchery and adultery. I make no mention of the virgins whom he defiled; this is usually judged tolerably. But I cannot pass over Amphitryon and Tyndarus, whose homes he spoiled with dishonor and infamy. That was a deed of consummate impiety and wickedness, his rape and outrage of the royal son. For it seemed of small account if he were corrupt and base in defiling the honor of women, unless also he did injury to his own sex. Indeed, this is true spoilage which is committed against nature. We shall see whether he who does these things is *maximus*; at any rate, he is not *optimus*. Such a name is far removed from those who are guilty of corruption of adultery, of incest; unless, perhaps, we men are mistaken when we call those who do such deeds wicked and lost and when we judge them most worthy of all punishment. Marcus Tullius, then, was a fool in charging Gaius Verres with his adulterous crimes,⁵ because Jupiter, whom he worshiped, committed the same actions; and he was a fool to charge Publius Clodius with the incest of his sister,⁶ for the same woman was 'both sister and wife'⁷ to that *Optimus* and *Maximus*.

Chapter 11

Who, therefore, is so senseless as to think that such a one reigns in heaven, one who ought not to have been even on earth? It was not without wit that a certain poet¹ wrote of the triumph of Cupid. In his book he makes Cupid not only the most powerful of gods but also their victor. Having enumerated the loves of each one, by which they have come under Cupid's power and sway, he described a procession in which Jupiter, with the other gods, is led in chains before the car-

⁵ Cf. Cicero, *In Verrem* 1.24.

⁶ Cf. Cicero, *De haruspicum responsis* 20.42; *Pro Milone* 27.73.

⁷ Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.47.

¹ Cf. *Fragmenta poetarum romanorum* (ed. Bachrens) 407.

riage of the triumphant Cupid. All this was depicted elegantly by the poet, but it is not far from the truth. For one who so free of virtue, who is conquered by desire and evil lusts, is not subject to Cupid, as the poet pictured, but to everlasting death.

But let us omit a discussion of morals, let us consider the matter so that men may know in what errors they wretchedly abide. The masses believe that Jupiter reigns in heaven; both learned and unlearned alike are convinced of this;² religion itself, prayer, hymns, shrines, and statues all demonstrate this. Yet they confess that he was born of Saturn and Rhea. How can he seem a god or, as the poet says, 'the author of men and things,'³ before whose beginning there were infinite thousands of men—those, for instance, who lived under Saturn's rule and who enjoyed the light before Jupiter? I see that there was one god-king in earliest times and another in those times that followed. It is possible, then, that there may be another one afterwards for times to come. If the earlier kingdom was changed, why should he despair that there can be change still to follow? Unless, perhaps, Saturn was able to produce one stronger than himself, but Jupiter is unable to? But the divine command either is always immutable or, if it is mutable (which cannot be), it certainly is always mutable.

Therefore, can Jupiter lose his kingdom as his father lost his? Clearly, this is so. For, although Jupiter had never spared virgins or married women, he did restrain himself from Thetis alone, because there was an oracle that whoever was born of her would be greater than his father. First of all, there was a lack of prudence not in keeping with a god; for, unless Thetis had foretold what things would happen, he himself would not know. If, then, he is not divine in character, he is not even a god—whence divinity is named, as humanity is from man.⁴ Next, there was a consciousness of weakness, for he

² Cf. Horace, *Odes* 3.5.1,2.

³ Vergil, *Aeneid* 12.829.

⁴ The effect is in the Latin: *divinus* and *divinitas* from *deus*, and *humanitas* from *homo*.

who has feared, fears something greater than himself. He who does this knows certainly that he is not the greatest, since it is not possible that something greater exists. Jupiter swears most solemnly by the Stygian swamp. 'The one act of dread superstition which is rendered to the gods above.'⁵ What kind of superstition is that or by whom is it rendered? Is it, then, some very great power which may punish the gods who commit perjury? Why their very great fear of the infernal swamp, if they are immortal? Why do they fear that which only those who must die are going to see? Why, therefore, do men raise their eyes toward heaven? Why do they swear by the gods above, when those very gods above are forced back to the gods of the lower regions and have there what they may reverence and adore? What sort of a thing, then, is the fact that there are fates which all the gods and Jupiter himself obeys? If the might of the Parcae is so great that they are more powerful than all the celestial beings and the ruler and master himself, why are not they said to reign whose laws and statutes necessity forces all the gods to observe? It is not a matter of doubt to anyone, is it, that he who submits to anything is not the greatest? If he were, he would not accept fate; he would make it.

Now I go back to a point I passed over. In the case of one goddess and one alone was Jupiter restrained, although he was impassioned by her, not through any virtue, but because of fear of a successor. This fear surely is the mark of him who is mortal and weak and of no avail; indeed, of one who could have been done away with when he was born, as his older brother had been before he was born, who if he could have lived would never have yielded the power to the younger one. Jupiter himself, however, preserved by stealth and stealthily nourished, was called Zeus or *Zōn*, not as they think from the fervor of celestial fire or because he is the giver of life and breathes souls into living things,⁶ which, indeed, is

⁵ Vergil, *Aeneid* 12.817.

⁶ The meaning of Zeus is 'Sky-god' or 'Fire-god.'

the power of God alone—for how can he inspire life who himself has received it from another?—but because he was the first of the male children of Saturn who lived. Therefore, men could have had another god as the ruler, perhaps, if Saturn had not been deluded by his wife. Anyway, the poets fashioned such tales. Whoever thinks this is mistaken. For the poets spoke about men and, in order to adorn those whose memory they were celebrating with praise, they said that they were gods. And so those things which they said of them as though they were gods were feigned, not those things which they said of them as men. This will become clear by an example. When Jupiter was about to violate Danae, he poured golden coins lavishly into her lap.⁷ This was payment for the outrage. But the poets who spoke of him as a god, in order not to infringe upon the authority of the majesty credited to him, imagined that he himself fell in a golden rain by using the same figure as that whereby they say ‘golden showers’⁸ when they describe a multitude of weapons and arrows. He is said to have carried Ganymede off on an eagle; that is a poetic figure. He either carried him off by a legion whose symbol the eagle is, or a ship on which he was placed had its protecting deity shaped as an eagle, just as it had a bull’s image when he seized and carried Europa across the sea. In the same manner he is related to have changed Io, daughter of Inachus, into a heifer. And so that she might escape the wrath of Juno, as she was then, ‘covered with hairs, for she was now a heifer,’⁹ she is said to have swum across the sea and to have come into Egypt, and there, when her former appearance was recovered, she became the goddess who is now called Isis. By what argument, then, can it be proved that Europa did not sit on a bull and that Io was not changed into a heifer? The fact that a certain day is kept among the feasts on which the voyage of Isis is celebrated. This teaches that she did not swim across, but

7 Cf. St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 18.13; Isidore, *Origines*, 8.11.35.

8 Cf. Ennius, *Annales* 287; Vergil, *Aeneid* 12.284.

9 Vergil, *Aeneid* 7.790.

sailed.¹⁰ So, those who seem to themselves to be wise, since they know that a living and earthly body cannot be in heaven, repudiate the whole Ganymede story as false and do not realize that it took place on earth, since the matter and the lust itself are earthly.

The poets, then, have not fabricated the exploits—if they did they were most foolish—but they added a certain color of poetic fancy to the deeds. They said these things not to detract but because they desired to embellish their heroes. In this way men are deceived, especially because, while they think that all these things are feigned by the poets, they reverence that of which they are ignorant. They do not know what the measure of poetic license is, to what extent it is permissible to proceed in fictionizing, since the poet's function consists in this,¹¹ that those things which were actually performed he may transfer with some graceful converse into other appearances by means of figurative language. But to feign the whole account which you relate—that is to be a fool and a liar instead of a poet.

Then they have made up those things which are believed to be fabulous. Is it the case, also, with those things which have been said about female divinities and the marriages of the gods? Why are they so depicted and so worshiped—unless, perhaps, not only the poets, but also painters and makers of images lie? If this is the Jupiter who is called a god by you, if he is not the one who was born of Saturn and Ops, no image except his alone ought to have been placed in all the temples. What do the likenesses of the women mean? What does the weak sex [indicate]? If this Jupiter is portrayed in this, the stones confess him a man. They say the poets have lied, yet they believe these. Rather, they prove by this very thing that they have not lied. For they so fashion statues of the gods that from the very diversity of sex it is apparent that the things which the poets say are true. What other evidence

¹⁰ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.7.10.

¹¹ Cf. Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.3.8.

has the image of Ganymede and the likeness of the eagle when they are placed before the feet of Jupiter in the temples and are adored together with him, except that the memory of the wicked crime and outrage might remain forever?

Nothing, therefore, was feigned by the poets in its entirety; something, perhaps, has been transferred and obscured by the figurative language by which the enfolded truth was covered, as in the story of the dividing of the kingdoms by lot. They say that the heaven fell to the lot of Jupiter, the sea to Neptune, and the lower world to Pluto. Why did not the earth come into the third lot? Only because the choice took place on the earth. Thus, it appears that they so partitioned and allotted the kingdom of the earth that to Jupiter went the command of the east; to Pluto, whose surname was Agesilaus, part of the west fell, since the district of the east, from which light is given to mortals, is the superior, whereas that of the west seems to be inferior. Thus they veiled the truth by falsehood, so that the truth itself withdrew nothing from public persuasion. The lot of Neptune is manifest. We say that his kingdom was of such a sort as that limitless command of Mark Anthony's was,¹² for the Senate had decreed to him power over the whole sea coast so that he might pursue the pirates and pacify the whole sea. So to Neptune fell all the maritime regions, with the islands. How can this be proved? Why, the old histories show it. The ancient author, Euhemerus, who was of the city of Messene, gathered the deeds of Jupiter and of the others who were regarded as gods and he wove a history from the titles and sacred inscriptions which were found in very old temples, and especially in the sanctuary of Triplylian Jove, when a legend indicated that the golden column had been placed there by Jupiter himself, and on this column he had inscribed his own deeds so that it might serve as a monument of his deeds for posterity. Ennius translated and followed this history; these are his words: 'When Jupiter gives command of the sea to Neptune [he does so that] he might

¹² Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.42.119.

rule over all the islands and all the [regions] which are placed near the sea.'

The accounts of the poets, then, are true but veiled with some covering and appearance. It is possible that even Mount Olympus may have given the figure to the poets for their saying that Jupiter had been allotted the kingdom of the sky, because Olympus is an ambiguous name meaning both mountain and sky. Euhemerus' history says that Jupiter had dwelt on Olympus: 'At that time Jupiter dwelt for the greater part of his life on Mount Olympus, and thither they came to him for justice, if any matters were in controversy. Likewise, if anyone had discovered something new which would be profitable for human life, he would come there and show it to Jupiter.'¹³ The poets transfer many things in this fashion, not to lie against the gods whom they worship, but to add loveliness and charm to their songs by various figures and devices. Those who do not understand how or why anything is depicted figuratively attack the poets as deceitful and sacrilegious.

Even the philosophers have been taken in by what seemed error; because those things related about Jupiter seemed to be most ill-befitting a god they made two Jupiters: one natural, the other fabulous. They saw, on the one hand, that which was true, that he of whom the poets speak was a man; but in regard to that natural Jupiter they were mistaken, being influenced by the common custom of religion, because they transferred the name of a man to God who, as we said above,¹⁴ because He is one only, does not need a name. For it is not possible for that Jupiter who was born of Saturn and Ops to be denied. Therefore, it is a foolish persuasion on the part of those who attribute the name of Jupiter to the supreme God.

Some are accustomed to defend their errors with this excuse. Those who are convinced that there is only one god, since

¹³ Euhemerus, frg. 8,9.

¹⁴ Cf. Ch. 6, n. 4.

they cannot deny it, affirm that they worship him, but that it suits their pleasure that he be called Jupiter. What is more absurd than this? Jupiter is not usually worshiped without the accompanying worship of his wife and daughter. Hence, who he is is clear; nor is it right for that name to be transferred where there is no Minerva or Juno. Why is it that the proper meaning of this name expresses not divine, but human, nature? Cicero interprets the names 'Jove and Juno as being derived from helping and Jupiter as meaning a father giving help.'¹⁵ This name poorly fits God, because to help is an attribute of a man conferring help upon one who is a stranger, and as a slight benefit. No one thus prays to God, that He 'help' him, but that He preserve him, that He grant him life and salvation. This is much more, far greater, than merely 'to help.'

And since we are speaking of a father, no father is said to 'help' his sons when he begets or educates them. It is too meaningless for the magnitude of fatherly benefit to be expressed by that word. How much the more ill-fitting is it when applied to God who is true Father, through whom we are, and whose we wholly are; by whom we are fashioned, vivified, enlightened; who imparts life to us, grants health, and provides a variety of foods. He does not understand the divine benefits who thinks that he is merely 'helped' by God. Therefore, he is not only unversed and ignorant, but even impious, who defiles the virtue of supreme power with the name of Jupiter. So, if we have grasped both from his deeds and from his character that Jupiter was a man and reigned on the earth, it remains for us to investigate his death. Ennius in his *Sacred History*, after describing all the deeds which he performed in his life, thus writes at the end: 'Then Jupiter, after he had circled the lands five times and divided the command among all his friends and relatives, and left to men laws and customs, and prepared grain, and had done many

¹⁵ *De natura deorum* 2.25.64, 26.66. The etymology is lost in the English: *iuvare*, 'to help'; Jupiter, a *pater iuvans*.

other good things for them, affected by immortal glory and memory left lasting memorials of himself. When his age was completely spent in Crete, he exchanged this life and passed to the gods. The Curetes, his sons, took care of him and honored him. His sepulchre is in Crete, in the town of Cnossos (Vesta is said to have founded this city) and on his sepulchre is inscribed in ancient Greek characters, ZAN KPONOY; in Latin, Jupiter son of Saturn.¹⁶ This, indeed, the poets do not hand down, but the ancient chroniclers. And these things are so true that they are confirmed by the Sibylline verses; for instance, these: 'Demons without life, images of those who be dead, whose tombs the ill-fated Crete holds as a prize.'¹⁷ Cicero in *The Nature of the Gods*, after mentioning that 'three Jupiters' have been enumerated by theologians, says the third was the Cretan son of Saturn and that his tomb is shown on that island.¹⁸ How, then, can a god be living in one place and dead in another? How can he have a temple here and a sepulchre there? Let the Romans know, therefore, that their Capitol, that is, the greatest memorial of their public religion, is nothing other than an empty monument.

Let us come now to his father who reigned before him and who, perhaps, had more power in himself because he is said to have been born from the juncture of especially great elements. Let us see what there was in him worthy of a god. First of all, there is that golden age which he is said to have ruled, because under him there was justice on the earth. I see something in him which was not in his son. For what is so fitting to a god than that his rule be just and his age revered? But when I also realize that he was born, I cannot consider him as the supreme god, inasmuch as I see something more ancient than he, namely, heaven and earth. I seek a God beyond whom there is nothing whatsoever, who is the Fount and Origin of things. Of necessity this One must exist, who

¹⁶ Ennius, frg. 12.

¹⁷ *Oracula Sibylla* 8.47.48.

¹⁸ *De natura deorum* 3.21.53.

established heaven itself and founded the earth. But if Saturn was born of these, as it is supposed, how can he, who owes his being to others, be the principal god? Who was in charge of the world before Saturn was begotten? But this is, as I said a short while ago, a poetic figure. Nor could it happen that elements, insensible and separated by such a great interval, should come together into one and bring a son into being, or that he who should be born would be not at all similar to his parents, but would have that form which his own parents did not have.

Let us see, then, what particle of truth might be hidden under this figure. Minucius Felix, in his *Octavius*, has concluded thus: 'Saturn, when he had been put to flight by his son and had come into Italy, was called the son of heaven [Coelus], because we are accustomed to speak of those whose virtue we admire or those who have come upon us suddenly, as fallen from heaven. He was called the son of Earth, however, because we call those born of unknown parents the sons of earth.'¹⁹ These things, indeed, have resemblance to the truth, but they are not truths, because it is agreed that even when he was reigning he was so regarded. He could have argued this way: 'Saturn, since he was a very powerful king, to perpetuate the memory of his parents, endowed heaven and earth with their names, although these were first called by other names.' We know that names are applied to mountains and rivers in this way. When the poets speak of the progeny of Atlas or of the river Inachus, they do not mean that men could be generated of things deprived of sense; they do mean those who were born of such men as, either living or dead, have given their names to mountains and rivers. That was a customary practice among the ancients, especially the Greeks. Thus, we have heard that seas took the names of those who had fallen into them, as the Aegean, and Icarian, and the Hellespont. In Latium, also, Aventinus gave his name to the mountain in which he was buried, and Tiberinus or Tybris to the river in which he was

¹⁹ Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 21.5-7.

drowned. So it must not be wondered at if the names of those who gave birth to exceedingly powerful kings were assigned to heaven and earth. It is clear, then, that he was born not of heaven, which is impossible, but from a man whose name was Uranus. That this is true Trismegistus is a witness: for, when he said that there were very few in whom there was perfect learning, he named among these his relatives: Uranus, Saturn, Mercury. Because he was ignorant of these matters, he gave the story differently. I have shown how he could have argued.

Now I will tell how, when, and by whom this was done. Saturn did not do this; it was Jupiter. In the *Sacred History* Ennius relates: 'Then Pan leads him up into the mountain which is called Pillar of Sky. After he had ascended he gazed upon the widespread lands, and there on that mountain he built an altar to the Sky, and Jupiter first offered sacrifice on that altar. In that place he looked up to the sky, as we call it now, and upon that which was above the world, which was called aether, he bestowed the name sky from the name of his grandfather. Jupiter placatingly first called that sky which was called aether, and the victim which he sacrificed there he burned completely.'²⁰

Nor is Jupiter found to have offered sacrifice here only. Caesar in Aratus relates that 'when Aglaosthenes was setting out against the Titans from the island of Naxos, he said that an eagle flew to him [Jupiter] as an omen, who took it as a good omen of victory and placed it under his own protection.' But the *Sacred History* testifies: 'even previously the eagle had settled on his head and portended the power for him.'²¹ Could Jupiter, then, have offered sacrifices to anyone but his grandparent the sky, who Euhemerus says was born in the ocean and buried in the town of Aulatia?

²⁰ Ennius, frg. 7.

²¹ Ennius, frg. 2.24.64.

Chapter 12

Since we have uncovered the secrets of the poets and have discovered the parents of Saturn, let us return to his virtues and deeds. He was just in his rule. First, from this very fact, he is not now a god, though because of that he was so called. There is the additional fact that he was not even just, but impious: not only toward his sons whom he killed, but also toward his father whose organs he is said to have mutilated, which, perhaps, might really have happened.¹ But men, in regard to the element which is called the sky, explode the whole tale as though imaginary, and most foolishly so. The Stoics, however, as is their custom, try to reduce the matter to a physical system; their opinion Cicero has presented in his *Nature of the Gods*: 'The highest and ethereal nature of heaven,' he said, 'that is, of fire, which by itself produced all things, they held to be without that part of the body which required union with another for procreation.'² This theory could have been appropriate for Vesta, if she were said to be a male. It is for this that they think Vesta a virgin,³ because fire is an incorruptible element and nothing can be born from it, inasmuch as it consumes all things which it seizes upon. On this, Ovid says in the *Fasti*: 'Nor do you think Vesta to be anything else but a living flame, and you see no bodies produced from flame. Therefore, she is rightly a virgin; she sends forth no seeds nor does she receive any, and she loves the attendants of virginity.'⁴

To Vulcan, also, this could have been ascribed, he who is truly thought to be fire, yet the poets have not mutilated him. It could also have been ascribed to the sun, in which is the nature and the cause of production. For without the fiery heat of the sun it is not possible for anything to be either born

1 Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.32.

2 *De natura deorum* 2.24.64.

3 Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.67,68.

4 *Fasti* 6.29-32.

or increased, so that to no other element would there be less need of the productive organs than to heat, by the nourishment of which all things are conceived, produced, and sustained. Finally, even if the case were such as they would want, why should we rather believe that Sky was mutilated, rather than that he was produced without any productive organs? If he produces of himself, he has no need of productive organs, surely, since he begot Saturn. But, if he had them and suffered mutilation by his son, the origin of things and all nature would have perished.⁵ Why, then, do they take away from Saturn himself, not only divine understanding, but also human, when they affirm that 'he is Saturn who contains the course and change of space and time and that he has that very name in Greek? For he is called *Kronos* which is the same as *chronos*, meaning a space of time; and he has been called Saturn because he is sated with years.'⁶ These are words of Cicero expounding an opinion of the Stoics. How foolish the opinion is very easy for anyone to see. For, if Saturn is the son of Sky, how could Time have been born of Sky, or how could Sky have been mutilated by Time, or how could Time have been later despoiled of his power by his son Jupiter? Or how was Jupiter born from Time? Or by what years could eternity be sated, since there is no limit to it?

Chapter 13

If, therefore, those speculations of the philosophers are pointless, what is left except for us to believe that it actually happened that a man was mutilated by a man? Unless perhaps, someone may believe him a god who feared a co-heir, when, if he had possessed any divinity, he ought not to have mutilated his father, but himself, so that Jupiter would not be born who deprived him of the possession of sovereignty. When

⁵ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.30,31.

⁶ Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.25.64.

Jupiter took as a wife his sister Rhea, whom we call Ops in Latin, he is said to have been forbidden by an oracle to bring up his male children, because it would happen that he would be expelled by a son. Fearing this event, he certainly did not devour the sons born to him, but he killed them, although it is written in the *Sacred History* that 'Saturn and Ops and the rest of men were at that time accustomed to eat human flesh, but that Jupiter in establishing laws and customs for men had prohibited by an edict the lawful use of that food.'¹ If this is true, what justice can there have been in him? But let us believe it to be an imagined story that Saturn devoured his sons, though with some foundation. Is it on this account that the popular legend says that he ate his sons, he who carried them out and consigned them to burial? Ops, however, when she had brought forth Jupiter, slipped the infant out of the way and stealthily sent him to Crete to be nursed. Again I must reprehend a lack of foresight. Why did he receive a response from another oracle? Why, if he were stationed in the sky, did he not see what was going on on the land? Why did the Corybantes with their cymbals deceive him? Lastly, why did some greater force exist which would conquer his power? To be sure, as an old man he was easily overcome by a youth and despoiled of his sovereignty. So, driven out, he fled and came to Italy by boat when he had wandered a long time, as Ovid relates² in the *Fasti*: 'The course of this ship remains to be told. The scythe-bearing god came to the Tuscan river in a ship, after having traversed the world.' Janus received him a wanderer and in need. The ancient coins are witnesses of this, on which Janus appears with his double face and on the reverse a ship, as the same poet continues: 'Pious posterity represented a ship on the brass coin, testifying to the arrival of the stranger-god.'

Not only all the poets, but also the writers of histories and ancient affairs agree that he was a man when they handed

¹ Ennius, frg. 9.

² Cf. *Fasti* 1.233-240.

down the memory of his actions in Italy.³ Such writers are the Greeks, Diodorus and Thallus, and the Latins, Nepos, Cassius, and Varro. When men lived in Italy in a rustic manner, 'He brought together a race indocile and scattered on high mountains; he gave them laws and willed that the place be called Latium, since he had lain safely concealed on these shores.'⁴

Does anyone think that he was a god who was driven out, who fled, who lay hidden? No one is so foolish. He who flees and lies in hiding must necessarily fear both force and death. Orpheus, who was less removed from his times, relates that Saturn openly reigned in the land and among men: 'Cronos first ruled over men on earth and from Cronos there sprang the mighty lord himself, far-sounding Zeus.'⁵ And our own Maro says: 'Golden Saturn spent this life on earth'; and in another place: 'Those were golden ages which they say passed by under that king: thus he ruled the people in placid peacefulness.'⁶ He did not say in the first quotation that he spent his life in heaven, nor in the second that he ruled the gods in peace. Hence, it is clear that the king was an earthly one, and this fact he states more openly elsewhere: 'And he will restore again to Latium the golden ages throughout the fields once ruled by Saturn.'⁷

Ennius even in the *Euhemerus* says that Saturn was not the first to have ruled, but his father Uranus. 'In the beginning,' he says, 'first Coelus held supreme command on the lands. He drew up and prepared that kingdom for himself along with his brothers.'⁸ There is not great dissension inasmuch as there is doubt on the part of the greatest authors concerning the son and the father. However, it is possible that each took place: that Uranus first began to excel in power among the others and to have a principate, not a kingdom; and that,

³ Cf. Minucius Felix 21.4.

⁴ Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.321-324. The word play is achieved only in Latin: *latere* is 'to lie hidden'; hence, Latium.

⁵ Frg. 243 (Abel).

⁶ Vergil, *Georgics* 2.538; *Aeneid* 8.324,325.

⁷ *Ibid.* 6.793,794.

⁸ Ennius, frg. 1.

later, Saturn gained greater resources for himself and acquired the royal name.

Chapter 14

Now, because the *Sacred History* differs somewhat from those accounts which I have noted, let us unfold those things which are contained in genuine books, lest in accusing these religious notions or scruples we seem to follow and approve of the follies of the poets. These are the words of Ennius: 'Next Saturn took Ops as wife. The Titan, who was the older, demanded that he himself should reign. Then Vesta, their mother, and the sisters, Ceres and Ops, persuade Saturn not to yield to his brother about the kingdom. Then the Titan, who was of a less favorable appearance than Saturn, for this reason and because he saw that his mother and sisters were urging that Saturn rule, yielded to him that he reign over them. So it was arranged with Saturn that, if any child of the male sex should be born to him, he should not bring him up. He did this for this reason, that the kingdom was to return to the Titan's sons. Then, when the first son was born to Saturn, they killed him. Later, there were born the twins, Jupiter and Juno. They presented Juno to Saturn's sight, but they secretly hid Jupiter, and those who concealed him gave him to Vesta to be reared. Likewise, Ops secretly bore Neptune, Saturn's son, and concealed him in private. In the same way Ops gave birth a third time, to the twins Pluto and Glauca. Pluto in Latin is Father Dis; others call him Orcus. Then they show the daughter Glauca to Saturn, but they conceal the son Pluto in hiding. Next the daughter Glauca dies.¹ This, as the accounts have been written, is the progeny and the line of Jupiter and his brothers: in this way it has been handed down to us from the sacred writings.' And a little later he adds this: Then the Titan, after he had discovered that sons had

¹ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.42.

been born to Saturn and secretly brought up, he led apart with him his own sons who were called Titans, and he seized his brother Saturn and Ops, surrounded them with a wall and placed a guard over them.²

How true this account is we gather from the Erythraean Sibyl who declares almost the same things herself, except for a discrepancy in a few points which do not relate to the heart of the matter.³ Jupiter then is freed from the charge of the greatest crime, the fact that he is reported to have bound his father in shackles and then overcome him. His paternal uncle, the Titan, did this because he had brought up sons contrary to the agreement and oath. The rest of the history is fashioned thus: Jupiter, now grown, when he heard that his father and mother had been surrounded with guards and hurled into chains, came with a great multitude of Cretans and overcame the Titan and his sons in a battle. He freed his parents from their chains, restored the kingdom to his father, and thus he returned to Crete. After these things the warning was given to Saturn to beware lest his son drive him from power. Then for lessening the power of the warning and dissipating the danger due to him because of the treachery of Jupiter he was to kill his son. But Jupiter, learning of the plot, finally gained the kingdom for himself and put Saturn to flight. The latter, when he was pursued even in exile by armed men whom Jupiter had sent to seize him or kill him, scarcely found a spot in Italy where he might hide.⁴

Chapter 15

Since it is established from these things that these were men, it is not obscure by what way they began to be called gods. If there were no kings before Saturn or Uranus because of the

² Ennius, *frag.* 3.4.

³ *Oracula Sibylla* 3.110-153; 190-201.

⁴ Ennius, *frag.* 6.

fewness of men¹ who were living a wild life without any ruler, there is no doubt but that in those times men began to extol the king himself and the whole race with the highest praises and with new honors, so that they also called them gods, whether because of their marvelous strength—they truly thought this, though still rude and simple; or, as often happens, with adulation of manifest power (in the individual in question); or because of the benefits to humanity wherewith they had been associated. Then the kings themselves, since they had been dear to those whose life they had arranged, left [to their survivors] a great longing for them after they died. So men fashioned representations of them, in order to draw some solace from looking at their images, and going even further in their love, they began to reverence the memory of the departed to such an extent that they seemed to render thanks to those who merited well and aroused in their successors the desire to rule well.

Cicero teaches this about the nature of the gods when he says: 'The life of man and common customs have accepted that by fame and will they should exalt to the sky men excelling in kind deeds. Hence we have Hercules, Castor, Pollux, Aesculapius, Liber.' And in another place he states this fact: 'In most states it can be understood that for the sake of increasing virtue or that all the best may approach danger more willingly for the sake of the republic, the memory of brave men is consecrated by the honor due the immortal gods.'² Surely, the Romans consecrated their Caesars and the Moors their kings for this reason. So, little by little, such religions began to exist, when those first who knew them imbued their children and grandchildren with that ceremonial respect, and then all their posterity, and finally these greatest kings, because of the celebrity of their name, came to be worshiped in every province. In a private capacity the individual peoples revered with the highest veneration the founders of their

¹ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.1-5.

² *De natura deorum* 2.24.62; 3.19.50.

tribe or city, whether they were men distinguished for bravery or women remarkable for chastity; so Egypt honored Isis; the Moors, Juba; the Macedonians, Cabirus; the Phoenicians, Urania; the Latins, Faunus; the Sabines, Sancus; the Romans, Quirinus. Indeed, in the same way Athens came to honor Minerva; Samos, Juno; Pamphos, Venus; Lemnos, Vulcan; Naxos, Liber; and Delos, Apollo.

Thus, among many peoples and in many regions, various sacred rites have been undertaken, while men desire to be pleasing to their princes, and are unable to determine upon other honors to confer upon the dead. Moreover, the piety or sense of duty of those who succeeded added much to the error: in the case of those who seemed born of divine stock, they bestowed divine honors on their parents and ordered them bestowed. Can anyone doubt how religious beliefs in the gods were instituted when he reads in Vergil³ the words of Aeneas giving commands to his followers: 'Now pour the libation to Jove and with prayers call upon Anchises our father'? He attributes to him not only immortality, but power over the winds, as well. 'Let us beg for winds and may he vouchsafe when the city is founded, to bear these sacred offerings made year by year in temples dedicated to him.' Liber, Pan, Mercury, and Apollo did the same thing with regard to Jupiter, and their successors did the same afterwards in their regard. The poets came on, also, and with songs composed for pleasure extolled them to the sky, just as they do who make adulation with deceitful panegyrics in the presence of even bad kings.⁴ This evil was started by the Greeks, and it is incredible what great masses of lies their levity, filled out by competence and richness of speech, has erected. So, admiring them, the first ones received these sacred ceremonies and passed them on to all nations. For this vanity the Sibyl rebukes them thus: 'Hellas, why have you trusted in human leaders? Why do you offer empty gifts to the dead? You make

³ *Aeneid* 7.133,134; 5.59,60.

⁴ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.2; 6.8.7.

offerings to idols. Who put this error into your mind, to leave the mighty God and perform such rites?"⁵

Marcus Tullius, who was not only the perfect orator but also a philosopher—if, indeed, there ever was a single imitator of Plato—in that book in which he consoled himself on the death of his daughter did not hesitate to say that the gods who were publicly venerated were men. And this testimony of his ought to be judged the most weighty for this reason, that he held also an augural priesthood and testifies to the fact that he himself revered and worshiped the same gods. Within a few phrases he gives us two points. While he admits that he will dedicate an image of his daughter in a way in which those [of the gods] were dedicated by the ancients, he taught also that they were dead and he showed the origin of the vain superstition. 'In truth,' he said, 'when we see a great many men and women, human beings, to be numbered as the gods, and when we venerate their most august shrines in cities and fields, let us approve of their wisdom by whose ingenuity and invention of laws and institutions we have our whole life adorned and arranged. If any living creature ever should have been consecrated, surely it was that one. If the progeny of Cadmus or Amphitryon or Tyndarus should have been exalted by fame into the skies, then the same honor certainly ought to be paid to this one. This, indeed, I will do, and I will consecrate you, the best and most learned of all, and I will place you, the immortal gods themselves approving my act, in their company for the respect of all mortals.'⁶

Perhaps someone may say that Cicero was delirious through excessive grief. That entire oration in regard to teaching, and examples, and the very perfect type of expression itself was the work not of a sick mind, but of a constant mind and judgment; this way of thinking itself exhibits no indication of such grief. Nor do I think that he could have written in

⁵ *Oracula Sibylla* 3.545-548.

⁶ Cicero, *Consolatio*, frg. 14.

so varied a manner, so fluently, so ornately, unless reason itself, and the consolation of friends, and the passage of time had assuaged his grief. What of the fact that he says the same thing in his books, *The Republic* and *Glory*?⁷ In his *Laws*, in which, following Plato, he intends to set down laws which he thought a just and wise state would use, he thus ordained about religion: 'Let them cherish the gods and those who have always been regarded as celestial beings and those whom their merits have placed in heaven: Hercules, Liber, Aesculapius, Castor, Pollux, Quirinus.'⁸ Likewise in the *Tusculans*, when he said that the entire heavens were almost filled with human-kind, he wrote: 'If, indeed, I should attempt to search the old books and to dig out from them those things which the writers of Greece have revealed, those very ones of the greater nations who are regarded as gods will be found setting out from here, from among us, into the heavens. Wherefore, since their sepulchres are displayed in Greece, remember, since you have been initiated, what things are handed down in the mystery cults: then, finally, you will understand how widely this stretches open.'⁹ Obviously, he appealed to the knowledge of Atticus, that it could be known from the mysteries themselves that those were men who were worshiped, and, although he incessantly admitted it about Hercules, Liber, Aesculapius, Castor, and Pollux, he feared to confess it openly about Apollo and Jupiter, their fathers, and also about Neptune, Vulcan, Mars, and Mercury, whom he called the gods of the greater nations. It is for this reason that he says: 'This opens out clearly,' that we may understand the same thing about Jupiter and the other more ancient gods. If the ancients consecrated their memory in the same way as he says that he was 'going to consecrate the image and name of his daughter,' they can be forgiven for their grieving, but not for believing. For who is so demented as to think that heaven is opened to the dead

⁷ Cf. *De republica* 6.13; *De gloria*, frg. 14.

⁸ *De legibus* 2.8.19.

⁹ *Tusculanae disputationes* 1.13.29.

by the consent and agreement of innumerable fools, or that someone could give to another what he himself does not have? Among the Romans, Julius is a god because the nefarious man Antony took a fancy to this; Quirinus is a god because this seemed a good thing to the shepherds. Yet, one lorded it over his twin brother and the other was a parricide to the state. If Antony had not been consul, Gaius Caesar would have lacked even the honor due any dead man for his services to the republic; this, indeed, could have been at the advice of Piso, his father-in-law, and Lucius Caesar, a kinsman, who forbade funeral rites to be performed for him, and of Dola-bella, the consul, who overturned his column, that is, his mound, in the Forum and cleansed that place. Ennius declares that Romulus had been the desire of his own people, and the people, mourning the king they had lost, spoke these words before him: 'O, Romulus, Romulus, what a guard for the fatherland have the gods made thee today! You have led us forth into the shores of light, O Father, O Producer, O Stock of gods.'¹⁰ Because of this longing the people more easily believed Julius Proculus, who was suborned by the fathers to announce to the people that he had seen the king, in an aspect more august than human, and that he had given him a mandate for the people to the effect that a shrine should be erected for him, that he was a god, and that he be called Quirinus.¹¹ This was done, and he persuaded the people themselves that Romulus had departed to the gods, and he freed the Senate from the suspicion of murder of the king.

Chapter 16

I could be content with these accounts which I have related, but many things necessary to the task that has been undertaken still remain. Even though, with the source of the

¹⁰ Ennius, *Annales* 115-118; cf. Cicero, *De republica* 1.41.64.

¹¹ Cf. Cicero, *De republica* 2.10.20; Livy 1.8; Florus 1.1.18.

religious superstitions itself destroyed, I might have removed all of them, one may pursue other lines of argument and refute the inveterate persuasion more fully, so that men finally may become ashamed and repent of their errors. This is a great work and one worthy of man.

I go on to loosen minds from the knots of religion,¹ as Lucretius says, but he could not indeed accomplish this, since he brought to his task nothing of the truth. This is the duty of us who claim the true God and refute the false ones. Those, then, who believe that the poets feigned the stories of the gods, yet believe that there are goddesses and worship them, are unwarily thrown back upon that which they had denied, that the gods unite in marriage and give birth to offspring. For it is not possible that two sexes are established except for the purpose of generation. They do not understand that, once the diversity of sex has been accepted, conception is a consequence, but this cannot apply to a god. Yet they think so, for they say that there are sons of Jupiter and the other gods. Therefore, new gods are born, and these daily, indeed; nor are they surpassed by men in fecundity. All things are full, then, of innumerable gods; no one, of course, ever dying. For, while the strength of men is incredible and their number inestimable—yet just as these are born so must they die—what may we think of the gods who have been born in so many ages and have remained immortal? Why, then, are so few worshiped? Unless, perchance, we think that it is not for the sake of generation, but only for securing pleasure that there are two sexes of gods. But to act and suffer thus for the sake of pleasure is a shame for mere man. When some are said to be born from others, it is a consequence that they are always being born, if, indeed, they have been born at any time; or, if they have ceased to be born, it is fitting for us to know why or at what time they ceased. Not without charm does Seneca in his books of moral philosophy ask: ‘Why, then, or for what reason is it that among the poets most lustful

¹ Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.32.

Jupiter has ceased to raise children? Is it because he has become a sexagenarian and the *Lex Papia*² has placed a buckle on him? Or has he obtained the “legal right of the three children”? . . . Or, finally, has there come into his mind “that you may expect from another what you have done to another” and does he fear that someone may do to him what he did to Saturn?”³

Let those who claim the gods see how they may answer this argument which we infer. If there are two sexes of gods, it follows that there is concubinage. If they come together, it is necessary that they also have homes, for they do not lack virtue and modesty and they would not act promiscuously and openly, as we see the dumb animals do. If they have homes, they consequently have cities; indeed, Naso is the author who refers to this: ‘The people dwell in different places, the powerful ones before others, and the bright dwellers in the heavens have set up their own household gods.’⁴ If they have cities, they will have fields, also. Now, who does not see what may follow? They plow them and cultivate them, which is done for the sake of food; therefore, they are mortals. Reversing this argument, the same effect is achieved. If they do not have fields, they do not have any cities; if they have no cities, then no homes; if they lack homes, then there is no concubinage; and if there is no concubinage among them, then neither is the female sex. But among these gods we see that there are women, too; therefore, they are not gods. Let him who can shatter this argument. For condition so follows condition that it is necessary to admit the conclusion. And no one can shatter this argument: of the two sexes one is stronger, one weaker, for the males are more robust, the females more weak. Weakness, however, does not apply to divinity; therefore, there is no female sex. To this is added the final conclusion of

² The *Lex Papia* controlled the number of children in a family.

³ Frg. 119.59.

⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.173,174.

the previous argument, that they are not gods, since there are women among them.

Chapter 17

For these reasons the Stoics interpret the gods very differently and, because they do not see through what there is in truth, they try to join them with the reason of natural things. Cicero, following these, has offered this opinion about the gods and their religious beliefs: 'Do you see, therefore, how from physical things well and usefully discovered the reason has been drawn to fabricated and feigned gods? This thing has begotten false opinions and turbulent errors and almost old-womanish superstitions: for the forms of the gods are known to us, and their ages and clothing and ornaments, and besides, their stock, their marriages, and relations have all been translated into the likeness of human weakness.'¹ What can be more plainly, more truly, said? The prince of Roman philosophy and a man endowed with the fullest powers of priesthood claims that the gods are fabricated and feigned; he bears witness that their cults are almost old-womanish superstitions; and he complains that men are implicated in false opinions and turbulent errors. The entire third book of *The Nature of the Gods* overturns and destroys all the foundations of [such] religion. What more, then, is expected of us? Can we surpass Cicero in eloquence? That, by no means. But he lacked confidence because he was ignorant of the truth, as he himself admits simply in the same work. For he says that he can say more easily that which is not than that which is; that is, that he knows the false but he does not know the true.²

It is clear, therefore, that they were men who are considered gods and that their memory was hallowed after their deaths. On that account, their ages are different and there are

¹ *De natura deorum* 2.28.70.

² Cf. *De natura deorum* 1.21.60.

certain or fixed representations for the different ones, because the statues were fashioned in that habit and age in which death took each one. Let us consider, if you will, the tribulations of the unhappy gods. Isis lost her son; Ceres, her daughter; and Latona, driven out and tossed about the whole earth, found scarcely a small island on which to give birth. The mother of the gods loved a beautiful youth, but, having discovered him with a mistress, she emasculated him and rendered him a half-man; for this reason her sacred rites now are celebrated by Gallic priests.³ Juno persecuted concubines most bitterly, because she herself was not able to give birth as her brother's mistress. Varro writes⁴ that 'the island of Samos was before named Parthenia, because there Juno grew to maturity and even wedded Jove.' So her noblest and most ancient temple is at Samos, and her statue is fashioned in the attire of a bride, and the sacred anniversaries of her nuptials are celebrated with rites. If then, she grew to maturity—if she was a maiden first and later a woman—he who does not understand that she was human admits himself a beast.

What shall I say of the obscenity of Venus, a prostitute to the lusts of all, not of gods only, but of men as well? For she gave birth to Harmonia after the infamous outrage of Mars; of Mercury, to Hermaphrodite, who was born Androgynus;⁵ of Jupiter, to Cupid; of Anchises, to Aeneas; of Butes, to Eryx; of her union with Adonis, of course, she could have given birth to no one, because the boy was killed, struck by a wild boar. She was the first, as is held in the *Sacred History*,⁶ who instituted the prostitute's art, and she was the authority for the women in Cyprus to make profit by prostituting their bodies. She authorized this so that she would not seem alone,

3 Schwartz (CSEL) thinks that St. Augustine used this section for his *De civitate Dei* 1.7 and 6.7.

4 Varro, the most learned of the ancient Latins, quoted by most ancient writers, was perhaps so well known that it is difficult to find precise sources. St. Augustine used Varro on this subject, too; cf. *De civitate Dei* 1.7; 6.7.

5 The word means 'a man-woman.'

6 Ennius, frg. 13.

different from other women, in her unchaste pursuit of men. Does even she whose adulteries are reckoned more than her offspring have some divine power?

Not even the virgins [among the gods] could have preserved chastity unimpaired. How do we think that Erichthonius was born? Was it of the earth, as the poets would have it seem? The deed itself cries out its details. For when Vulcan had made the armor for the gods and Jupiter had given him choice of asking for the reward which he wished, swearing, as was his custom, by the infernal swamp that he would refuse nothing, the lame smith demanded the hand of Minerva. Jupiter, Optimus Maximus, bound by such a great oath,⁷ could not have refused this, but he warned Minerva to resist and to defend her chastity. During that contest, they say, Vulcan spilled his seed upon the earth, whence Erichthonius was born, and thus this name was imposed upon him: ἀπὸ τῆς ἐρῆδος καὶ χθονός, 'from struggle and the soil.' Why did she, a maiden-deity, commend to the three Cecropian virgins that boy who had been shut up and sealed with a dragon? In my opinion it was evident incest, which can in no way be colored over. Another, when she had almost lost her lover, 'who had been torn apart by aroused horses,'⁸ called upon that outstanding physician, Aesculapius, to cure the youth and make him whole.

The kindly one [Trivia] hides him [Hippolytus] in secret dwellings and sends him to the grove of the nymph Egeria, where alone the ignoble one may live out his time and where he may be Virbius, making a change in his name. What does she wish for herself so diligently? Why such solicitous care? Why the secret abodes? Why is the relegation or dispatch so far away, or to a woman, or into solitude? Why, then, the change of name? Why, finally, such an unyielding hatred of horses?⁹ What do all these things signify except consciousness

⁷ Cf. *De civitate Dei* 18.12.

⁸ Vergil, *Aeneid* 7.767.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.* 774-780.

of guilt and a love not at all virginal? It is clear why she was undertaking such great labor for so faithful a youth who had refused obedience to a loving stepmother.

Chapter 18

At this point those also must be refuted who confess, not only that the gods have been made of men, but that they praise them, even take pride in them, as in Hercules by reason of his strength, or in Ceres and Liber for their gifts, or in Aesculapius and Minerva for the arts they have discovered. How foolish these things are and how unworthy, by which men contaminate themselves with inexpressible crime and become enemies of the true God when they undertake rites in honor of the dead in contempt of Him, I will point out by specific instances. They say that it is virtue which raises a man to heaven, not that which the philosophers talk about which is placed among the goods of the soul, but a corporal virtue which is called strength. Since this was outstanding in Hercules, he is said to have merited heaven. Who is so foolish or silly as to judge that the strength of the body is a divine or even a human good, when a greater amount of it is attributed to beasts, and when it is often broken in one sickness, or diminishes and rusts away with old age itself? And so Hercules, when he saw his flesh being deformed with ulcers, did not wish to be healed or to become an old man, lest he should ever seem slighter or more deformed than himself. They thought that he had mounted to the sky from the pyre where he had set himself afire, and those very details which they have most foolishly marveled at they have put in the statues and representations they fashioned and consecrated, so that monuments might stand forever of the vanity of those who believed that gods were made because of the slaughter of beasts.

But this may be the fault of the Greeks who always regarded very light matters instead of very great ones. What of ourselves? Are we wiser? There are those who despise athletic prowess because it has no worth, but regal strength, because it can work widespread harm, they admire to such a degree that they think that brave and warlike leaders are placed in the company of the gods; that there is no other way to immortality except to lead armies, to lay waste foreign lands, to destroy cities, to burn towns, to stamp out free peoples or to subject them to slavery. To be sure, the more men they have afflicted, despoiled, slain, the more they think themselves noble and famous; captivated by the appearance of an inane glory, they give the semblance of virtue to their crimes. I should prefer that they invent gods for themselves by slaughtering wild beasts than by approving so bloody an immortality. If anyone strangles one man, he is held as an evil-doer and criminal, and it is not considered fitting that he be admitted to even the earthly dwelling place of the gods. But he who has cut down infinite thousands of men, who has flooded fields with blood, and infected rivers, he is admitted, not only to the temple, but even to heaven. In Ennius, Africanus speaks thus: 'If it is right for anyone to ascend the heavens in wounds, then to me alone the greatest gate of heaven lies open.'¹ This was because he did away with and destroyed a great part of the human race. Oh, in what great darkness you moved, Africanus; rather, you, O poet, who believed that an ascent to heaven was opened to men through killing and bloodshed!

Even Cicero assented to this vanity. 'It is true,' he says, 'Africanus, for to Hercules, too, the same gate was open,'² just as though he himself were, when this took place, the door-keeper of heaven. Indeed, I am not able to decide whether I should grieve, or whether I should think it laughable, when I see serious men, learned and wise, as they seem to themselves, tumbling in such miserable waves of error.

¹ *Epigrammata* 3.9,10 (from Cicero, *De republica*).

² *De republica* (incert. frg.)

If this is the virtue which makes us immortal, then I should prefer to die than to be a cause of destruction to as many as possible. If immortality can be produced in no other manner except through bloodshed, how could it take place if all should agree upon peace? This could certainly happen if, casting out pernicious and impious rage, men should desire to be innocent and just. Would no one then be worthy of heaven? Would virtue perish, since men would no longer rage against other men? But those who regard overturnings of cities and peoples the greatest glory will not endure public leisure; they will seize, rage, and, insolently bearing injuries, they will break social relationships in order to have an enemy to destroy as wickedly as they have harassed him.

Now let us continue on to the rest. The bestowal of gifts gave the name of gods to Ceres and Liber. I can explain by divine Scriptures that wine and grain were used by men before the time of the offspring of Caelus and Saturn, but let us pretend, anyway, that they were discovered by these two. Is it a greater thing to seem to have collected more grains and, by crushing them to have taught the making of bread, and to have squeezed out the juices of choice vines and to have made wine, or to have generated the grains and vines themselves and to have brought them forth from the earth? God left these things, in fact, to be worked out by human ingenuity. Still, it is not possible for it to be otherwise than that all things are His who granted the wisdom to man to discover those things and who made those very things which could be discovered.

The arts also are said to have bestowed immortality upon their inventors, as medicine has upon Aesculapius; and crafts, Vulcan. Therefore, let us also worship those who taught laundering or sewing. Why is honor not paid to the discoverer of pottery? Is it because those who are rich despise Samian ware? There are also other arts whose discoverers were very beneficial to human life. Why have temples not been assigned to them, also? But, of course, it is Minerva who discovered all of them, and, therefore, the workmen supplicate her. Be-

cause of such ordinary things Minerva ascended the heavens! That is why, in truth, people abandon Him who has produced the earth with all living creatures and the sky with its stars and lights, in order to venerate her who taught the method of weaving. What about that one who taught how to heal wounds in bodies? Can he be more outstanding than He who formed the bodies themselves, who gave the system of feeling and living, and, finally, who thought of and produced the very herbs and other aids on which the art of healing rests?

Chapter 19

But someone may say that his veneration ought to be given both to this supreme God who made all things and to those who have been of benefit in a measure. First, it has never happened that one who has worshiped these [deities] should worship God also, nor is it possible, because, if the same honor is granted to those others, then He Himself is not worshiped absolutely whose religion requires belief that He is the one and only God. Our greatest poet declares that all those who have improved life through the arts they have discovered are in the lower regions and that the very discoverer of the art of medicine was hurled into the Stygian waters by a thunderbolt.¹ Thus may we understand how great is the power of the father omnipotent, who wipes out even the gods by his destructive power. Perhaps ingenious men held this reasoning with themselves. Because that god could not be struck by lightning, it is clear that he has not been made. Rather, because he has been made, it is clear that he was a man, not God. The deceit of the poets was not in fact, but in name: they feared evil if they should admit, contrary to public persuasion, that which was true. Now, if this is agreed among themselves, that the gods have been made of men, why, then,

¹ Cf. Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.663; 7.772,773.

do they not believe the poets whenever they describe their flights and wounds and deaths and battles and adulteries?² It is to be understood from these actions that the gods could not have been made in any way, because not even the men were good, and they performed during their lives those things which produced everlasting death.

Chapter 20

I come now to the religious beliefs proper to the Romans; up to this point I have been speaking of general ones. Lupa, the nurse of Romulus, has had divine honors given her, and I could accept this if she were the animal itself whose aspect she wears. But Livy is the author of the statement that the effigy is of Larentina,¹ and, indeed, not of her body, but of her mind and customs. She was the wife of Faustus, and because of the use of her prostitute body she was called a she-wolf, that is, a prostitute, among the shepherds; so, also, we have the name *lupanar* for a house of ill-repute.² The Romans followed the example of the Athenians in representing her; for among them, when a certain prostitute by the name Leana had killed a tyrant, since it was wrong for a statue of a prostitute to be set up in the temple, they placed there an effigy of the animal whose name she bore. And just as the Greeks made a monument of the name, so do the Romans of the profession. A feast day also was dedicated to her name and the Larentalia established. Nor do the Romans worship this prostitute only, but Fausta also, who, Verrius writes, was the harlot of Hercules. How great must that immortality be considered which even harlots attain? When Flora had gained great wealth through her prostitute's ways, she named the populace her heir and left a certain amount of money, from

² Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.16.42.

¹ Cf. Livy 1.4.

² Cf. St. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 18.21; Isidore, *Origines* 18.42.2.

the annual interest of which her birthday was to be celebrated by the display of games which they called the Floralia. Because this seemed evil to the Senate, it was decided that the purpose should be related more closely to the name itself, so that a certain dignity might be added to the shameful situation. They, then, imagined her as the goddess who presided over the flowers and said that it was necessary to placate her, so as to have trees bear fruit and vines flourish well and prosperously. The poet of the *Fasti*, following that imposture, wrote that there was a not ignoble nymph called Chlore and that when she was betrothed to Zephyr, she received from her spouse in place of a dowry this gift, that she should have power over all flowers.³ Those things are said honestly, but they are dishonestly and disgracefully believed; coverings of poetic language ought not to deceive us when truth is being sought. Those games, therefore, are merely celebrated with all wantonness to the memory of a prostitute. For, besides the license of words with which every obscenity is poured forth, the harlots also take off their garments at the insistence of the people; then they perform the part of mimic actresses and in the sight of the people and to the satiety of their impure eyes display abominable motions.

Tatius consecrated an image of Cloacina found in the Cloaca Maxima and, because he did not know whose likeness it was, placed on it a name from the place. Tullus Hostilius made the likeness of Fear and Terror and worshiped it. What shall I say of this except that he received his deserts who wanted always to have his gods present as men desired them. The action of Marcus Marcellus in consecrating Honor and Virtue differs only in the dignity of the names used, but it is the same thing in fact. With the same vanity the Senate enrolled Mind among the gods; if it actually had had any of this [mind], it would never have adopted religious rites of such a sort. Cicero says that Greece undertook a great and bold plan because it had consecrated statues of Cupids and Loves in

³ *Fasti* 5.195ff.

the gymnasia;⁴ it may be seen that he flattered Atticus and joked with the man who was his familiar friend. For this was not great, nor should it be called a plan at all, but the depraved and deplorable will of shameless men who prostituted their children, whom they should have been educating, to the libidinous passion of youth. They wanted the gods of wantonness to be cherished by these children both in the most effective places, where naked bodies are exposed to the eyes of the corrupt, and at an age when, simple and unwary, they can be snared and caught before they are aware. Why is it strange if from this nation all excesses have streamed, a nation where vices themselves are called religious, and such practices are not only avoided, but even cultivated? And therefore, to this opinion, as though he surpassed the Greeks in precedence, he added: 'But it was fitting for virtues to be consecrated, not vices.' If you accept this, O Marcus Tullius, do you not see what will happen, that the vices will rush in with the virtues, because evils adhere to the good and are more powerful in the minds of men? If you forbid these to be consecrated, that same Greece will answer you that she cultivates some gods that they may be propitious; others, that they may not be harmful. This is always the excuse of those who have regarded their evils as gods, as the Romans do Rust and Fever. If, therefore, vices ought not to be consecrated (in this I agree with you), neither should virtues. For not of themselves are they wise or do they feel, nor are they to be placed within walls or temples made of clay, but within hearts. They are to be grasped the more interiorly lest they be false, [as they would be] if they should be placed outside of man. So I mock that famous law of yours which you lay down in these words: 'But those qualities, through which ascent to the heavens is given to man, Mind, Virtue, Piety, Faith; let there be shrines for these and their praises.'⁵ These qualities cannot be separated from man. If they are to be worshiped, then it is necessary that they be

⁴ *De legibus*, frg. 2; 2.11.28.

⁵ *Ibid.* 2.8.19; cf. also Lactantius 1.15.23.

worshiped in man himself. If they are outside of man, what need is there to worship those things which you lack? For virtue must be revered, but not the image of virtue, and it must be revered, not by some sacrifice or incense or solemn imprecation, but by the will alone and intention. What else is it to reverence or cultivate virtue but to grasp it with the mind and hold it? As soon as anyone begins to wish for it, he attains it. This alone is the cultivation of virtue: religious worship and no other veneration must be kept except that of the one God.

What need is there, O eminently wise man, to occupy with superfluous structures places which may serve human uses? Why should priests establish vain rites and cultivate insensible objects? Why immolate victims? Why expend such great amounts on fashioning and honoring images? A much stronger and much more incorrupt temple is the human heart. Let this be adorned, instead; let this be filled with those true powers. For these false consecrations, therefore, there follows what must. Those who so cultivate, that is, those who pursue the shadows and phantoms of virtues, are not able to embrace those things which are true. So there is no virtue in anyone, vices in mastery everywhere; no faith, each one seizing everything for himself; no piety toward relatives or parents when one is niggardly, with avarice and greed and rushing into evils and the sword; there is no peace, no concord, when wars rage publicly, and even private enmities are infuriated unto bloodshed; there is no shame when pleasures are unchecked and contaminate each sex and all parts of the body. Yet men do not cease to reverence those things which they flee from and despise. They worship with incense and to the highest degree things which they ought to shrink from with their inmost feelings; this whole error springs from ignorance of that principal and supreme Good.

When the city was under siege by the Gauls, and the Romans, hemmed in on the Capitol, made war engines from women's hair, they consecrated a temple to Venus Calva. They

do not understand, however, how empty their religious notions are, even from the very fact that they mock them with their foolishnesses. Perhaps they had learned from the Lacedaemonians to fashion gods for themselves from events. When they were besieging the Messenians and the enemy had secretly escaped from their deceived beseigers and had advanced to plunder Lacedaemon, they were routed and put to flight by Spartan women. When the tricks of the enemy were learned, the Lacedaemonians pursued them. The armed women came quite a distance to meet these on their way. When the women saw their men preparing themselves for a battle, because they believed them to be Messenians, they exposed their bodies. But the men, inflamed with passion at the sight and recognition of their wives, mated with them just as they were, armed, and even promiscuously—they took no time for determination—just as the youths previously sent out by those same people had mated with maidens, from whom were born the Parthenians. In memory of this act they set up a temple and shrine to Venus Armata, which, even though it originated from a disgraceful cause, however, it seemed more honorable to consecrate an armed Venus than a base one.

At the same time an altar was set up to Jupiter Pistor, also, because he had warned them in quiet that they should make bread from all the grain which they had and hurl it into the camp of the enemy, and it was due to this that the siege had been lifted—the Gauls despairing that the Romans could be subjected by a scarcity. What sort of mockery of religion is that? If I were a defender of those religions, what could I do but seriously complain that the power of the gods had fallen into such great contempt, was regarded as a laughing stock and was given the basest names? Who does not laugh at the Oven-Goddess Forma or, rather, at those learned men who perform the Fornacalian celebrations? Who, when he hears the name of the goddess Muta, can contain his laughter? They say that she is the one of whom the Lares have been born, and they name her Lara or Larunda. What is she, who can-

not speak, able to grant to a worshiper? Caca also is cherished, she who gave indication to Hercules of the theft of the oxen; she secured divinity because she betrayed her brother.⁶ Then there is Cunina who protects infants in cradles and removes enchantments; and Stercutus who first introduced the method of fertilizing fields with dung; and Tutinus, on whose chaste bosom brides watch, so that the god may seem to have first plucked their modesty.⁷ There are a thousand other transformations, so that we may say that those who have taken them up as objects of worship are more vain than the Egyptians who venerate certain monstrous and ridiculous images.

Still, these have some sort of representation. What about those who worship the shapeless and rough stone that is called Terminus? This it is which Saturn is said to have devoured in place of Jove, and not undeservedly is honor paid to him. When Tarquin wished to make the Capitol and there were chapels of many gods there, he consulted them through augury whether they would yield to Jove. When all the rest yielded, Terminus alone remained; whence the poet calls that 'the immobile rock of the Capitol.'⁸ As mighty Jupiter, to whom the stone did not yield, was discovered from that object, so, perhaps, came that confidence because it freed him from paternal jaws. So, when the Capitol was built, an opening was left in the roof above that very Terminus, that, since it had not yielded, it might enjoy the free sky, which they themselves did not even enjoy who thought the stone enjoyed it. And to this stone, therefore, supplication is made publicly as to a guardian god of the boundaries, a god who is not only a stone, but at times also a poet. What can you say of those who worship such things except that they themselves are stones and blocks of wood—with strongest right to those titles?

⁶ Cacus was a robber slain by Hercules.

⁷ The names have their meaning from the Latin: the word for 'cradle' is *cuna*; *stercus* is 'dung'; *tutus*, 'safe.'

⁸ Cf. Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.446.

Chapter 21

We have spoken of the gods themselves who are worshiped; now a few words must be said about their acts of worship and mysteries. Among the Cypriotes, Teucus immolated a human sacrifice to Jupiter, and handed that kind of sacrifice down to posterity which was only later lifted under Hadrian's rule. There was a law among the Tauri, a wild and inhuman nation, that guests should be offered to Diana, and that sacrifice was celebrated many times. The Gauls placated Esus and Teutates with human blood. Not even the Latins were free from this depravity, inasmuch as Jupiter Latiaris is even now honored with human blood. What good do those who so sacrifice ask for from these? Or how can such gods provide for men by whose punishment they are propitiated? This is not so strange a thing about the barbarians whose religion is in accord with their customs, but for us, who have always claimed the glory of meekness and humanity, ours are more enormous violations of sacred law than these rites, are they not? Rather are they to be regarded as criminal who, although they have been trained in the study of liberal disciplines, fall away from humanity, than are those who, rude and inexperienced, fall into evil deeds through ignorance of the good. It is clear, however, that this rite of immolating men is an ancient one, since Saturn was worshiped in Latium with the same kind of sacrifice—not, indeed, that a man was immolated at an altar, but that one was thrown into the Tiber from the Mulvian bridge. That this was done consistently, and with a certain oracular authority, Varro is our source. The last verse of the oracle was something like: 'They seemed to throw heads and torches to Aida and to the Father.'¹ Since that seems ambiguous, both a torch and a man were customarily thrown to him. But that kind of sacrifice is said to have been

¹ This passage is not clear; cf. Brandt-Laubmann text, p. cxii. The difficulty originates perhaps from the fact that the word $\phi\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ =man and $\phi\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ =light.

removed by Hercules when he returned from Spain, the rite, however, remaining insofar as images of rush should be thrown in place of real men, as Ovid shows in the *Fasti*: 'As long as the Tirynthian [Hercules] comes into these fields, the sad rites are performed each year in the Leucadian fashion. He threw men of straw into the water; imitation bodies are thrown after the example of Hercules.'² These rites the Vestal Virgins perform, as the same poet tells: 'Then, also, the virgin customarily hurls images of ancient men made of bulrushes, from the sturdy bridge.'³

Concerning the infants who were immolated to the same Saturn out of hatred of Jupiter, I find it difficult to speak. They were such barbarians, such depraved men, in calling parricide—a foul and horrible crime against the human race—a sacrifice, when they deprived of life tender and innocent souls, at the age which is by far the dearest to parents, without any regard for piety, and when they surpassed in wildness the cruelty of all the beasts, which at least love their offspring! O incurable madness! What more could the gods do for them, since they were so angered, than if they were well-disposed? They defiled their worshipers with parricide, glorified them with childlessness, and despoiled them of human feelings. What holiness can there be for these men? Or what will they do in profane places who commit the most extreme crimes around the altars of the gods? Pescennius Festus in his books of history recounts fully how 'the Carthaginians were accustomed to immolate human victims to Saturn, and when they were conquered by Agathocles, King of the Sicilians, they thought the god was angry with them; and so, that they might more diligently make atonement, they immolated 200 of the sons of the nobles.'⁴

'Their religion could urge so much evil. It evoked deeds often abominable and wicked.'⁵ With whom, then, did those

² *Fasti* 5.629-631.

³ *Ibid.* 621,622

⁴ *Historica romana*, frg. (ed. Peter) 375.

⁵ Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.101; 83.

extremely demented men take counsel for that sacrifice, when they killed so large a part of the state, as great a number, perhaps, as not even the victorious Agathocles had slain? Those public rites ought to be judged of no lesser insanity than that kind of religious function, one example of which is that of the [Great] Mother, whereby men themselves make propitiation with their own sex organs—for with such mutilation they make themselves neither men nor women; another is that of virtue, the same one they call Bellona, in which the priests themselves sacrifice, not with another's, but with their own blood. With their shoulders cut and flashing drawn swords in each hand, they run about, are carried out, and lapse into insanity. Quintilian in *Fanaticus* says very well: 'If a god demands that, he is mad.'⁶ Are these things, too, sacred rites? Is it not more satisfying to live in the manner of beasts than to reverence gods so impious, so profane, so bloody? But where those errors and this so great wantonness originated, we shall discuss in its proper place.⁷ In the meantime, let us take a look at others which are lacking in crime, lest we seem in the zeal of our attack to select only the worst ones. There are sacred rites associated with Egyptian Isis to the extent of her having lost or found her little son. At first, her priests, eunuchs in the flesh, strike their breasts and lament just as she herself had done when she lost him; then a child is produced as though found again, and the mourning is changed into gladness. So Lucan: 'Never is there enough of seeking for Osiris.'⁸ Always they lose him; always they find him. So in these sacred rites an incident is re-enacted of an event which really happened, which certainly, if we have any sense, indicates that the woman was mortal and almost beside herself until she found her only son. And this fact did not escape that very poet in whose work the young Pompey, hearing of the death of his father, speaks: 'I will reveal now to the nations Isis, deity

⁶ Cf. *Quintiliani Declamationes* (ed. Ritter) 1 and note.

⁷ Cf. below, p. 94ff.

⁸ The quotation is from Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 9.693; cf. also Lucan 8.831.

of the pyre, and I will sprinkle Osiris wrapped in linen among the crowd.⁹ This is the Osiris whom the common people call Serapis, for they are accustomed to change the names of their consecrated dead, I believe, so that no one may think that they were men. Romulus, too, after his death became Quirinus; and Leda, Nemesis; and Circe, Marica; and Ino, after she threw herself headlong, was called Leucothea; her mother became Matuta; and Melicertes, her son, Palaemon and also Portumnus.

The sacred rites of Eleusinian Ceres are not unlike these. Just as there the child Osiris is sought by his weeping mother, here Proserpina is in tears, having been carried off to incestuous marriage with an uncle.¹⁰ And because Ceres is said to have sought her with flaming torches from the peak of Aetna, for this reason her rites are celebrated by the waving of burning wands.

At Lampsacus the sacrificial victim to Priapus is a little ass. The following reason is given in the *Fasti* for its sacrifice. When all the gods had assembled for the feast of the Great Mother, and when, sated with banqueting, they were passing the night in games, Vesta rested on the ground and went to sleep. There Priapus stealthily violated her sleep and her modesty, but she was awakened by the incessant cry of the little ass upon which Silenus was carried, and the passion of the attacker was discovered.¹¹ For this reason the inhabitants of Lampsacus are accustomed to slaughter the ass as though to avenge Priapus, but among the Romans the same animal is crowned with biscuits at the Vestal rites in honor of the chastity which was preserved. What is more disgraceful, what more revolting, than if Vesta is a virgin through the benefit of an ass? But the poet invented the tale. It is no more true, then, is it, than the story told by those who have written the *Phenomena*,¹² when speaking about the two stars of Cancer

⁹ Lucan 9.158,159.

¹⁰ Cf. Cicero, *In Verrem* 4.48.106.

¹¹ Ovid, *Fasti* 6.309-348.

¹² Cf. the Scholiasts of the *Aratus* of Caesar Germanicus p. 70 (Beysig).

which the Greeks call *onous*, that they were little asses which had carried their father Liber across, when he could not cross the river, and to one of whom he had given this reward, to speak with human voice? So between him and Priapus there arose a contest of obscene magnitude. Priapus was conquered and he slew his irate victor. This, however, is much more foolish, but the poets may say what they wish. I do not omit such a deformed mystery nor do I expose Priapus, lest anything worthy of ridicule appear.

These things the poets have surely feigned, but of necessity they were invented for the sake of covering up some greater disgrace. Let us inquire what this is, therefore. Certainly, it is manifest. For, as a bull was sacrificed to Luna because it had similar horns and 'She placates Hyperion bound with Persian rays with a steed lest a tardy victim be given to the swift god,'¹³ so in this case, since the magnitude of his virile frame is enormous, a more fitting victim could not be found for him than that which could imitate the very one to whom it was offered. At Lindos, which is a town on Rhodes, sacred acts are performed in honor of Hercules, the rites of which are very different from the others, insofar as they are celebrated, not with *euphemia*, as the Greeks say, but with maledictions and execration, and they consider it a violation if ever amid their solemn rites a good word should happen to fall from anyone not on his guard. The following is the reason alleged for this, if, however, there can be any reason in the completely inane. When Hercules had been taken there and suffered hunger, he saw a plowman working and he asked him to sell him one of his heifers. The plowman, however, said that it could not be done, since his every hope of tilling his land rested on the two beasts. Hercules, using his customary violence, since he could not get the one, killed the two. When the unhappy man saw his cows being slaughtered, he took vengeance on his injury with evil words, which was most gratifying to the elegant and urbane man. For, while he was preparing the meal

13 Ovid, *Fasti* 1.395,396.

for his companions and devouring the other man's cattle, he listened to the plowman reviling him most sharply and was loud in laughter and jeering. But after it was agreed that divine honors be conferred upon Hercules out of admiration for his strength, an altar was erected to him by the citizens, which they named from the action, *bouzugon*, at which two tied heifers were immolated, like those which he had taken from the plowman. And Hercules appointed and commanded the plowman himself to be his priest so that he might always use the same maledictions in the celebration of the rites, for he said that he had never dined more pleasantly. Now, these things are not sacred actions, but sacrilegious, in which that is considered holy which, if it were performed in other functions, would be most severely punished.

What else do the sacred rites of Cretic Jove himself show, except how nourishment is drawn away from or given to the Father? There is a chapel of the nymph Amalthea, who nursed the infant at her breasts, and about her Germanicus Caesar speaks thus in the poem *Aratus*: 'She is thought to be the nurse of Jupiter, if indeed the infant Jupiter took milk from the trusty udders of the Cretan goat, who declares her pleasing fostering by a brilliant star.'¹⁴ Jupiter used the skin of this goat as a shield in his struggle against the Titans, for which reason he is called aegis-bearer¹⁵ by the poets. So whatever was done in absconding the child, that very act is repeated through representation in the sacred rites. The same mystery exists in relation to his mother, as Ovid says in the *Fasti*: 'Steep Ida resounds long since with turmoil as the safe child screams with infant mouth. Some strike shields with sticks, some strike at empty helmets; the Curetes and the Corybantes follow this practice. The thing lay hidden and imitations of the early deed remain; companion goddesses move their airy and hollow backs. They strike cymbals in

¹⁴ Caesar Germanicus, *Aratus* 165ff.

¹⁵ *Aegis* means 'goat-skin.'

place of helmets and beat tympanies for shields; the flute gives Phrygian melodies as it did of yore.'¹⁶

This whole notion, as imagined by the poets, Sallust rejected and sought an ingenious explanation why the Curetes are said to have been foster fathers of Jove, and thus he says: 'Because they were princes of divine understanding, long existence had celebrated them as the foster parents of Jove, just as happened in fitting the other things into a larger framework.'¹⁷ How much the learned man was mistaken the story itself reveals. For if Jupiter is the chief of gods and religions, if before him no gods could be worshiped widely, because those who are worshiped had not yet been born, it is clear that the Curetes were princes of a sort different from that of divine understanding, through whom every error has been introduced and the memory of the true God has been removed.

And so from these very mysteries and ceremonies they ought to understand that they supplicate dead men. I do not ask that anyone believe the fictions of the poets. Let him who thinks that these are lies consider the writings of the priests themselves, and let him unfold whatever in the sacred works pertains to religious rites; perhaps he will find out more than we relate, and let him learn from these that all those things which are regarded as sacred are inane, foolish, and fabricated. If, moreover, anyone has laid aside error at the perception of wisdom, he certainly will smile at the foolishness of men almost demented; I mean those who even leap about in ignoble dances or who run about nude, anointed, crowned, masked, or heedless of the mire. What shall I say of shields now rotten with age? When they carry these, they think that they are bearing the gods themselves on their shoulders. Furius Bibaculus is reckoned among exceptional examples of piety.¹⁸ When he was praetor, he carried the shield, although lictors went before him and although he enjoyed by grace of

¹⁶ *Fasti* 4.207ff.

¹⁷ Sallust, *Historia* 3.60.

¹⁸ Cf. Valerius Maximus 1.1.9.

his magistracy freedom from this duty. He, however, was not Furius, but obviously was furious, who thought that he could adorn the praetorship by this ministry. Rightly, therefore, when things are done by men who are not untrained and uneducated, does Lucretius exclaim: 'O foolish minds of men, O blind hearts! In such great shadows of life and in exceptional perils is passed this time of life, whatever there may be of it!'¹⁹ Who would not smile at these mockeries who has any sanity whatever, when he sees men, as though captive in mind, do those things seriously which, if anyone should perform them in fun, he would seem to be excessively lascivious and foolish?

Chapter 22

The author and establisher of these vanities among the Romans was Sabinus, that king who especially involved the rude and inexperienced minds of men in new superstitions.¹ In order that he might do this with some authority, he pretended that he had nocturnal meetings with the goddess Egeria. There was a certain very shady cave in the Aricine grove from which a stream flowed with a perennial spray. He had been accustomed to retire there, without witnesses, so that he could lie to this effect, that he was handing over to the people, upon the advice of his goddess-wife, sacred practices which were acceptable to the gods. It may be seen that he wished to imitate the astuteness of Minos, who hid himself in a cave of Jupiter and, delaying there for some time, promulgated laws as though they had been given to him by Jupiter, so that he might bind men to obedience, not only by his power, but also by religious influence. Of course, it was not difficult to persuade shepherds. So Sabinus created the pontiffs,

¹⁹ Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.14.16.

¹ Cf. Florus 1.2.1-4; 8.3. Perhaps Florus and Lactantius had a common source here and perhaps they used the 'histories' of the father of Seneca.

the flamen-priests, the Salii, and the augurs. He arranged the gods by families. Thus, he softened the fierce minds of the new people and recalled them from war-like matters to pursuits of peace.² But although he deceived others, he did not deceive himself. For many years after, during the consulship of Cornelius and Baebius, in the field of the scribe Petilius at the foot of the Janiculum Hill, two stone chests were found by diggers, in one of which was the body of Numa, in the other seven Latin books about pontifical law in which he distilled, not only the religious practices which he had himself instituted, but all others besides. When this matter was brought to the Senate, it was decreed that these books be destroyed. So Quintus Petilius, the urban praetor, burned them before a gathering of the people. That was done foolishly, indeed, for to what advantage were the books burned when this very action, namely, that they were burned because they were derogatory to religion, was memorialized? There was no one in the Senate at that time who was not very foolish, however; because the books could be destroyed, yet the affair itself could not be erased from memory. So, while they wished to prove to posterity with what great piety they defended religion, they lessened the authority of that very religion by their testimony.

As Pompilius was among the Romans a founder of religious nonsense, so before Pompilius there was Faunus in Latium, who established evil rites even in honor of his grandfather Saturn, and who extolled his father Picus among the gods and consecrated his sister Fenta, the same as Fauna, his wife. Gavius Bassus holds that 'she was named Fatua because she was in the habit of predicting fortune for women as Faunus did for men.' Varro writes that this same woman was of such great modesty that for as long as she lived no male except her husband ever saw her or heard her name.³ For this reason women sacrifice to her in secret and call her the Good Goddess. And

² Cf. Valerius Maximus 1.1.12 (Livy 40.29).

³ Cf. Arnobius 5.18.

Sextus Clodius in that book which he wrote in Greek relates that she was the wife of Faunus, and that she had, contrary to custom and royal decorum, secretly drunk a pot of wine and become intoxicated. She had been beaten to death by her husband with myrtle rods; but afterwards, when he repented of his deed and could not endure his longing for her, he had conferred divine honors upon her. For this reason, an overturned jar of wine is set up during her rites. So Faunus also left to posterity no small error, which, however, prudent people perceive. For Lucilius derides the folly of those who think that the statues are gods in these verses: 'Those Lamian bugbears, which Faunuses and Pompiliuses and Numas have originated, these he trembles at; here he places all things. As infant boys believe that all brass symbols are alive and are men, so these think all fictions are true; they believe that a heart resides in bronze figures. Projections of painters, nothing of truth, everything feigned!'⁴

The poet actually compared foolish men to infants, but I say that they are much more imprudent. Children think that the images are men;⁵ men think them gods. Age makes children think what is not so; foolishness prevails among men. Children will shortly cease to be deceived, but the vanity of men hardens increasingly.

Orpheus first introduced in Greece the sacred worship of Father Bacchus, first celebrated on the mountain near Boeotian Thebes where Liber was born. Since he frequently acted to the song of the cithara, he was called Cithaeron. Those sacred rites are even now called Orphic, in which he himself was afterwards torn apart and destroyed, and it was generally during the same times as those in which Faunus existed. But who preceded in age can be a matter of question, since Latinus and Priam reigned during the same years; likewise, their fathers, Faunus and Laomedon, in whose reign Orpheus with the Argonauts came to the Ilian shore.

⁴ Lucilius, Bk. 15, frg. 2.

⁵ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 11.2.27.

Let us proceed further, then, and ask who actually was the first originator of the worship of the gods. Didymus in his books of *Pindaric Narration* says: 'Melisseus, the first King of the Cretans, offered sacrifice to the gods and introduced new rites and pomps for sacred worship. He had two daughters, Amalthea and Melissa, who nursed the child Jupiter with goat's milk and honey.'⁶ From this the poetic story that the bees had flown to him and filled the child's mouth with honey took its origin. Melissa was appointed by her father as the first priestess of the Great Mother, which is why those in charge of the Great Mother cult are still called Melissas. But the *Sacred History* attests that: 'Jupiter himself, after he secured control of affairs, had come into such great insolence that he himself set up shrines to himself in many places.'⁷ When he was going through the world, as he had come into each region, the kings and princes of the people joined in showing hospitality and friendship to him. When he departed from each, he ordered a fane to be erected to himself in the name of his host, so that the memory of the friendship and alliance might be preserved. Thus were constituted the temples to Jupiter Ataburius and Jupiter Labryandius, for Ataburius and Labryandius were his hosts and his helpers in war; similarly, the temples to Jupiter Laprius, Jupiter Molionius, Jupiter Casius, and others were erected in the same way. Jupiter concluded most cleverly that he would gain divine honor for himself and a perpetual name for his hosts in such religious union. Moreover, they rejoiced and willingly obeyed his command and celebrated yearly rites and feasts in honor of his name. Aeneas followed a similar plan in Sicily, when he bestowed upon the city he founded the name of his host, Acestes, so that afterwards Acestes happily and gladly would love it, enlarge it, and adorn it. In this manner Jupiter sowed the practice of his own cult throughout all lands and gave an example for imitation to the others. Whether, therefore,

⁶ Cf. Schmidt, *op. cit.* 220.

⁷ Ennius, frg. 11.

the method of religious worship of the gods flowed from Melisseus, as Didymus handed down, or from Jove himself, as Euhemerus has it, there is agreement, however, about the time when the gods began to be worshiped. Melisseus had great precedence by age, for it is he who brought Jupiter up as a nephew. So, it is possible that he instituted the worship of the gods either before or while Jupiter still was a child; that is, he would have advanced the mother, Ops, and grandmother, Tellus, of his ward, she who was wife of Uranus, and his father Saturn. And he himself by this example and training would have advanced Jupiter to such great pride that he afterwards would dare to assume divine honors to himself.

Chapter 23

Now, since we have brought to earth the origin of these empty religious beliefs, it remains for us to gather together the times during which those whose memory is cherished existed. Theophilus, in his *De temporibus*, written to Autolycus, says in his account: 'Thallus says that Belus,¹ whom the Babylonians and Assyrians worship, is found to have been 322 years more ancient than the Trojan War, that Baal, moreover, was a contemporary of Saturn, and that the two grew up at the same time.'² This is true to the extent that it can be gathered from reason itself. Agamemnon, who waged the Trojan War, was the grandson of Jupiter, and Achilles and Ajax were his great-grandsons; Ulysses was nearest by the same relationship, and Priam, indeed, by a long time. But certain authors have it that Dardanus and Iasius were sons of Corythus, not of Jupiter, and, if this were so, he could not have had his own great-grandson Ganymede for shameful uses. If you divide the years suited to the parents of those whom I

1 The more usual rendering is Baal; cf. interpolation of the Codex Fuldensis of Tertullian, *Apologia* 19.

2 Cf. Servius on *Aeneid* 3.167.

named above, the number will agree. From the destruction of the city of Troy 1,470 years are taken. From this reckoning of the times it is clear that Saturn, who was the begetter of all the gods, was born not more than 1,800 years before. Therefore, let not the glory of the age of sacred beings be given to those whose origin and reason and times have been analyzed.

There still remain some points which have much value for the refutation of false religions, but I have determined already to end this book, lest it exceed the norm. Those points, in fact, ought to be more fully investigated, so that, after each detail has been refuted which seems to stand in the way of truth, we may be able to direct and inspire those men who still wander in uncertainty as to the true religion. The first step of wisdom in this regard is to recognize the false;³ the second is to come to know the true. Therefore, in the case of the person whom this first introduction of ours, in which we uncovered false doctrines, has benefited, he shall be summoned to a knowledge of the true, than which there is no more delightful pleasure for man, and he will be already worthy of the wisdom of heavenly learning who has advanced willing and ready to the learning of the others.

3 Cf. St. Jerome, *Epistola* 58.10.

BOOK TWO

THE ORIGIN OF ERROR

Chapter 1



ALTHOUGH I HAVE SHOWN IN BOOK I that the religions of the gods are false, because those, whose varied and dissimilar cults men have adopted by custom, consent, and foolish conviction throughout the world, were mortal and, having discharged their lot in life, were molded to divine usage at their death; however, lest any doubt should remain, I will reveal these errors in this second book at their very source. It will explain all the causes by which men were deceived and believed in the beginning that such were gods, and then, later on with inveterate persuasion, continued in the most depravedly adopted religions. I long to declare the majesty of the one God by exposing these empty rites and uncovering the impious vanity of men, and by undertaking the more useful and greater task of recalling men from evil paths and restoring them in their own regard. My purpose in this is that they may not despise themselves so vehemently, as certain philosophers do, who regard themselves as infirm, unnecessary, and of no value, and even to have been born in vain. This opinion usually forces many to vice!

While they hold that we are an object of care to no god, or that after death we shall be nothing, they yield themselves wholly to license; and, while they think it is permissible for them, they thirstily strain after the imbibing of pleasures, through which they imprudently rush into the snares of death.

They do not know what the reason of man is. If they chose to uphold it, they would in the first place acknowledge their master; they would follow virtue and justice; they would not surrender their souls to figments of the earth; they would not seek after the death-bearing delights of passion; and finally, they would value themselves of great worth and would understand that there is more in man than what is seen; man whose strength and condition cannot otherwise be retained unless they lay aside deformity and take up the worship of their true Parent.

Indeed, as is fitting, often thinking about the highest things, I marvel that the majesty of the one God which holds and rules all things has fallen into such great oblivion, and that that which alone ought to be worshiped is alone most neglected. I wonder that men themselves have been brought to such great blindness that they prefer dead gods to the true and living God, and earthly beings and those buried in the earth to Him who was the Founder of the earth itself. Pardon for this impiety of men could be granted if it were absolutely from ignorance of the divine Name that this error came. But, since we often see that those very worshipers of the gods acknowledge and praise the highest God, what pardon for their impiety can they hope for themselves who do not acknowledge the worship of Him whom it is wrong for man not to know at all? Whey they swear, when they make a wish, and when they give thanks, they do not name Jupiter or the many gods, but God. Thus does truth itself under the very force of nature burst forth even from unwilling hearts.

This is not, indeed, the case in prosperity. For then especially does the thought of God slip out of the memory of men, when, enjoying His benefits, they ought to give honor to divine indulgence. But whenever serious necessity should fall upon them, then they remember God. If the terror of war has raged, if the pestiferous blight of sickness has touched them, if a long period of drought has prevented their crops from nutritious yield, if harsh storms or hail has attacked them, they rush to

God; they seek His help; they pray that He come to their aid. If anyone is tossed on the sea by a raging wind, he calls upon Him; if anyone is afflicted by any force whatever, he implores Him the more; if one is driven to the extreme necessity of begging, he appeals to the one God by prayers asking for his food; yes, in His divine and unique name He is asked to show mercy to Himself among men. Thus, they never remember God except when they are up against evil. After the fear has dissipated and the dangers have receded, then, to be sure, they eagerly rush to the temples of the gods, and to these they pour libations, and to these they make sacrifices, and these they wreath. But the God whom they implored in their very necessity, they thank with not even a word! So from prosperity springs luxury, and from luxury, as from all vices, springs impiety toward God.

From what cause may we suppose that this arises, unless there be some perverse power who is always inimical to truth, who rejoices in human errors, and whose one everlasting work is to spread darkness and blind the minds of men, that they may not see the light or look up to heaven and preserve the nature of their own bodies? Whereas other living creatures look down upon the earth, with their bodies prone, because they have not received reason and wisdom, and inasmuch as ours is an upright stature and since a raised countenance has been given us by the God who made us, it is clear that those religions of many gods are not humanly reasonable since they reduce a heaven-directed being to the worship of earthly ones.¹ For, when that one and only Parent of ours fashioned man, that is, an animal, intelligent and capable of reason, He raised him up from the ground and made him stand erect for the contemplation of his Maker. That especially clever poet has noted this:

Although the other animals, prone, look at the earth,

¹ This is a favorite argument with Lactantius. Cf. his entire treatise on *The Workmanship of God*; also cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.56.140; *De legibus* 1.9.26; Sallust, *Catiline* 1.1; Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 17.2; Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 16.

The face of man He lifted high and ordered him to behold

The sky and to raise an upright gaze unto the stars.²

For this reason, surely, the Greeks called him *anthropon*³ because he looks upward. Thus, they renounce themselves and rob themselves of the name of man who do not look above but below, unless, perhaps, they think that the very quality of upright stature has been given to man without cause.⁴ Certainly, God has willed us to look to heaven, and not uselessly. The birds and nearly all the dumb beasts can 'see' the sky, but to us has been given the ability to 'behold' the heavens as we stand erect so that there we may seek religion, so that although we cannot see with our eyes the God whose abode the heavens are, we may contemplate Him with our minds. But this is by no means what the man who venerates bronze or stone, which are earthly things, does. It is, therefore, most perverse, when the form of the body, which is temporal, is upright, that the mind itself, which is eternal, become base, for our shape and stature signify nothing else but that the mind of man ought to look there where his countenance is directed, and that his soul ought to be as upright as his body, so that it may imitate that which it ought to dominate. Men are, in truth, forgetful of both their name and their purpose when they cast their eyes down from the height and fix them upon the earth. They fear the works of their own hands, as if it were possible for anything to be greater than its fashioner.

Chapter 2

What sort of folly is it, therefore, either to fashion those things which they may fear after a while or to fear those things which they have fashioned? 'We do not fear those

² Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.84-86.

³ The Greek word *anthropon* literally means 'one looking to or upward.'

⁴ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 11.1.5f.

things,' they tell us, 'but those to whose image they have been made and to whose names they have been consecrated.' Of course, you are afraid, therefore, because you think that they are in heaven; and, if they are gods, it is not possible that it be otherwise. Why, then, do you not raise your eyes to heaven and make sacrifices in the open after calling upon their names? Why do you look to walls and wood and stones rather than toward where you believe them to be? What do the temples mean? The altars? What of those very images which are monuments either of the dead or of the absent? Actually, the very scheme of fashioning likenesses was invented by men so that those who had been withdrawn by death or separated by absence could be retained in the memory. Shall we place the gods among their number? If they are among the dead, who is so foolish as to worship them? If they are among the absent, they ought not to be worshiped, since they do not see what we do or hear our prayers. If gods, then they cannot be classed as absent, for, because they are divine, in whatever part of the world they may be, they see and hear all things. Then images are superfluous for those who are everywhere present, since it is enough to call with prayers upon the names of those listening. 'But those presences are not there except in their own images.' Of course, this is so, just as people believe that the souls of the dead wander about their tombs and their corpses. However, after that god has come to be near at hand, there is no longer need for an image of him. Now, I ask you, if anyone gazes often at the picture of a man who is away so that he may take comfort from it for sustaining the absence, he would not seem sane, would he, if, when the other has returned and is present, he should continue to gaze at the picture rather than wish to enjoy the sight of the man himself? Certainly, not at all sane. Still, the image of the man seems necessary when he is far away, but it will be superfluous when he is near at hand. The image of God, however, whose power and spirit, everywhere diffused, can never be absent, is certainly always superfluous.

But they fear that their entire religion may be empty and vain if they see nothing before them to adore. So they set up likenesses, which, because they are images of the dead, are very much like the dead: they lack all the senses. There ought to be a living sensible likeness of a god living to eternity. If this word takes its name from its quality of likeness, how can those images which neither feel nor are moved be considered like to God?¹ Hence, the likeness of God is not that which is made by the hands of man from stone or bronze or any material whatever; it is man himself who feels, and is moved, and does many great actions. Men who are most foolish and absurd do not understand that, if likenesses could feel and be moved, they would willingly adore the man by whom they were fashioned, for they would be unfashioned and rough stone or unformed and raw material unless they had been put into shape by that man. Man, therefore, must be reckoned the parent, as it were, of those things which have come to be through his hands; it is through man that they have come to have form, shape, and beauty, and, therefore, he who made them is better than those things which were made. Yet no one looks up to and fears the very Maker; they are afraid of what He made, as though it were possible for the work to be of more avail than the workman. Rightly does Seneca in his moral books say that men venerate the likenesses of gods. "They supplicate them with bended knee; they adore them; through the whole day they sit or stand near them; they throw offerings to them and slay victims for them; and while they look up to these so much they condemn the laborers who made them."² What is so self-contradictory as to despise a statue maker, to adore the statue, and not even to admit to social intercourse the man who makes your gods for you?

What strength, then, what power can they have, when he

¹ The effect in the Latin is obtained by the use of words: *simulacrum* for sensible likeness, *similitudo* for quality of likeness, and *similis* for like.

² Frg. 120.

who made them does not have any? But not even those powers which he possessed—sight, hearing, speech, movement—could he give to them. Is there anyone, therefore, so foolish that he thinks that there is something of a god in an image in which there is not even anything of man except a shadow? But no one considers these things. Men are infected with a vain and stupid persuasion, and their minds have drunk in fully the juice of folly. So they who are themselves sensible adore insensible things; they who are wise adore irrational things; they who live adore lifeless things; with an origin from heaven they adore earthly things. It is fitting to proclaim that verse of Persius, as though from some lofty tower where all might hear: ‘O minds bent upon the earth and empty of heavenly things!’³

You look directly upon the heavens to the sight of which that Artificer, your God, has aroused you. He gave you an erect bearing; you bend yourselves down to the earth. Your lofty minds, directed with your bodies high unto their Maker, you press down to lower things, as though you were ashamed not to be born four-footed beasts.⁴ It is not right for a heaven-directed being to be leveled with earthly ones inclining to the ground. Why do you deprive yourselves of celestial benefits and of your own will fall prone to the ground? For you are turned into miserable ones of the earth when you seek below that which you ought to have sought on high. Those ludicrous and fragile figments of human fingers, formed from whatever material they may be, what else are they but the earth from which they have come? Why, then, are you subjecting yourselves to inferior things? Why do you place earth upon your heads? When you submit yourselves to the earth and make yourselves lowlier, you sink beyond to the infernal regions and condemn yourselves to death because there is nothing inferior to and more lowly than the earth except death and hell. If you wished to avoid these, you would despise the earth

³ Persius, 2.61.

⁴ Cf. Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 16.

placed under your feet by preserving the normal stature of your body, an upright one, which you received for this reason—that you might be able to unite your eyes and your mind with Him who made them.⁵ Therefore, to despise and tread upon the earth is nothing else than not to adore images because they are made of earth; and, likewise, it is not to desire riches and to spurn the delights of the body, since wealth and the body itself, whose hospitality we make use of, is of the earth. Cherish the living, that you may live. It is necessary that he die who has assigned himself and his soul to the dead.

Chapter 3

But what advantage is there in a discussion of this sort made public and common, and delivered to unlettered men, when we see even learned and wise men, although they understand the vanity of the false religions, persisting, nevertheless, by I know not what depravity, in cultivating those very cults which they despise? Cicero understood that those gods which men adore were false. When he had said many things which were strong enough for the overturning of the religions, he said, however, that those things ought not to be discussed openly lest such a 'discussion extinguish the religious beliefs that have been publicly accepted.'¹ What can you do in a case like that, for instance, when one who, even though he realizes that he is wrong, willingly dashes against rocks so that all people may stumble, and willingly plucks out his own eye that all may be blind? He would not merit well of the others whom he permits to err, nor of himself who accedes to the errors of others, nor finally, does he make use of the good of his own

⁵ This notion of the position of the body and the 'location' of the spiritual part of man in it is almost a fetish with Lactantius, but it is interesting to note how he is able to return solidly to the point at issue and make a strong apologetic conclusion.

¹ *De natura deorum* frg. 1.

wisdom so as to fulfill with deeds what he has perceived with his mind, but willingly and knowingly he catches his foot in a snare so that he himself is captured along with the others whom he should have, as one more wise, set free. It is far better, Cicero, if there is in you any virtue, to strive to make the people wise. It is a worthy thing whereby you might expend all the strength of your eloquence. You must not fear that in such a good cause oratorical skill will fail, you, who have often defended even bad causes fluently and strongly. But, to be sure, you fear the prison of Socrates, and, therefore, you do not dare to take up the patronage of truth. Still as a wise man you ought to condemn death, and it would be much more beautiful if you had died on account of uttering benedictions rather than maledictions.² Nor could *The Philippics* have brought you more praise than would have been yours from a discussion of the error of the human race and a recall of the minds of men to sanity. But let us assign it to timidity, which ought not to be found in a wise man.

Why, then, are you yourself engaged in the same error? I see that you venerate things that are earthly and made by human hands. You know that these things are empty, and still you do the very same things which they do whom you yourself acknowledge to be consummate fools. What good was there, then, in your seeing the truth which you would neither defend nor follow? Willingly do they err, even those who realize that they err. How much more is the uninstructed crowd, which rejoices in empty displays and gazes at all things with childish minds, delighted with frivolities and captivated by the appearance of the statues! For it is not able to ponder any one thing within itself that it may understand that nothing ought to be worshiped which is perceived by mortal eyes, since it is necessarily mortal. Nor is it to be wondered at if they do not see God since they themselves do not even see the man whom

² Cicero's death was demanded by Antony when he rose to power with Octavian as punishment for the orator's attacks against him in the orations called *The Philippics*, which Cicero modeled on those of Demosthenes against Philip of Macedon.

they think they see. For this, which is subjected to the eyes, is not man, but it is the receptacle of a man, whose quality and form are perceived, not from the features of the vessel in which he is contained, but from deeds and behavior. Those who worship statues, therefore, are bodies without men because they have surrendered themselves to bodily things. They do not see anything more with their minds than with their bodies, although it is the duty of the mind to discern more subtly those things which corporal vision is not able to observe. The philosopher-poet severely accuses those men as low and abject who, contrary to the plan of their own nature, prostrate themselves to venerate earthly objects. For he says: 'And they make their minds craven with the fear of the gods and they press them in subjection down to the earth.'³ When he said this, of course, Lucretius had quite another meaning, namely, that nothing ought to be worshiped because the gods have no care for human things. In another place he avers that the religious cults and worship of the gods are an inane duty: 'It is no piety often to be seen veiled and to face a stone, to make visits to all the altars, and to fall prostrate on the ground or to stretch one's palms out before the shrines of the gods; and neither is it piety to sprinkle the altars with much blood of sacrificial animals, nor to bind vows with vows.'⁴

Certainly, if these things are empty, it is not reasonable for sublime and lofty minds to be called down from their heights and pressed to the earth, but rather, they ought to dwell upon heavenly matters. False religions, therefore, have been impugned by the wiser writers, because they felt that they were false, but the true one has not been championed, because they did not know just what kind it was or where it might be. And so they held the opinion, as it were, that there was no religion at all, since they could not find the true one. In this way, they fell into error, much greater than the error of those who held a false religion. For those worshipers of

³ Lucretius, 6.52f.

⁴ *Ibid.* 5.1198-1200.

fragile images, even though they were foolish, since they put celestial powers in corporal and earthly things, retain, nevertheless, a certain amount of wisdom, and they can obtain pardon who hold, even though not in actual practice of the thing, in intention, at any rate, that the highest function of man (in fact, it is the greatest if not the only distinction between men and beasts) is in religion. To the extent that they were the wiser, in that they understood the error of false religion, they have become just so much the more foolish because they did not think that there was some true one. So, because it is easier to pass judgment on the thinking of others than on our own, while they saw the headlong falling of others, they did not look at what was in the way of their own feet. On each side is found the height of foolishness along with a certain trace of wisdom; therefore, you might hesitate about which you would call the greater fools, whether it be those who take up the false religion or those who have none.

But, as I said, excuse can be found for the unlearned and those who do not profess to be wise, whereas for those who professing wisdom display rather foolishness, no excuse can be found. I am not so unfair, certainly, as to think that they should have divined that they might come upon the truth by themselves. I admit that this could not be. However, I do exact this from them, that they could have proved it from reason itself. They would have acted more wisely if they had recognized that there was some true religion, and if they had impugned the false ones openly and proclaimed that the true one was not that held by men.

Perhaps they were moved by the argument that, if there were any true religion, it would assert and vindicate itself and would not allow any other to exist. They could in no way see how, or by whom, or to what an extent true religion was being oppressed, because it is a matter of divine pledge and heavenly secret. Therefore, unless this is taught, no one can know it in any way. This is the summary of the argument. The unskilled and unwise hold false religions as true, because

they neither know the true nor understand the false. Those more wise, lest they fall into error, do the same thing, either because they do not know the true, or because they continue in those which they know to be false so that they may seem to hold to something, or because they worship nothing at all, when this very thing is the greatest error—to imitate the life of beasts under the form of man. Now to understand the false is, indeed, a property of wisdom—but of human wisdom. It is not possible for this step to be passed over by man, and so many of the philosophers took up the religions, as I have explained. To know the true, on the other hand, belongs to divine wisdom, but man through himself is not able to arrive at this knowledge, unless he be taught by God. So the philosophers attained to what was the height of human wisdom, that they might understand what it is not; they were not able to attain to this point, that they might say what it is. The statement of Cicero is well known: ‘Would that I might be able to discover the true as easily as to refute the false.’⁵ But because it exceeds the capability of the human condition, the faculty of this office has been assigned to us to whom God has granted the knowledge of truth. The last four books shall serve to explain this; meanwhile, let us now uncover the false teachings as we began to do.

Chapter 4

How much majesty can statues or images possess, when it rested in the power of a mere man as to whether they be made something else or that they be made at all? Priapus in Horace speaks thus about this: ‘Once I was a fig-tree trunk, useless wood, when the carpenter did not know whether to make a bench or a Priapus. He decided on the god. Then, a god I became, the greatest dread of thieves and birds!’¹ Who would

⁵ *De natura deorum* 1.32.91.

¹ *Satires* 1.8.1-4.

not be secure with so great a guardian? The thieves are so foolish that they fear the lust of Priapus, while the very birds, that they think are driven away by the terror of his scythe or groin, settle upon and build nests in and defile the statues made skillfully so very similar to men. But Flaccus as a writer of satiric verse, mocked the vanity of men, whereas, those who act in such a way are of the opinion that they are doing something serious. Finally, the greatest poet, a man wise in other matters, in this alone did not act as a poet, but raved like a foolish old woman when he orders even in those most faultless books of his that this should be done: 'Let the guardian against thieves and birds, the watchful Priapus, Hellespontic lord, protect them with his willow scythe.'²

They adore these mortal things or things made by mortals; they can be broken, burned, and come to nought. They are wont often to be broken by buildings falling with age, they fall to ashes consumed with fire, and generally, unless their very size aids them or a diligent guard watches, they become the prey of thieves. What insanity is it, therefore, to fear those things for which either ruin or fire or theft is feared! What emptiness to hope for some protection from those things which cannot protect themselves! What perversity to run to their protection which, when they are violated, are unavenged themselves unless they are vindicated by their worshipers!³ Where then is truth? Why, there where no force can be applied to the religion, where nothing which can be violated appears, and where sacrilege cannot be perpetrated. Whatever is subject to the eye and hand, because in truth it is fragile, is foreign to the whole realm of immortality. In vain, however, do men worship and adorn gods with gold, ivory, and gems, as if in truth they were able to take any delight from these things. What is the use of precious gifts to things which sense nothing, or what is that to those who are dead? With like reason they bury the bodies of the dead in the earth, smeared with oint-

² Vergil, *Georgics* 4.110f.

³ Cf. Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum* 14.

ment and wrapped in precious garments, in the way that they honor the gods, who neither feel when these things are done nor know when they are being worshiped, for they did not take on senses with a consecration rite. It did not please Persius that golden vessels were brought into temples, for he regarded as a superfluity in religious practices that which is an instrument of avarice, not holiness. It is much more satisfying to a god whom you worship rightly to bring in place of a gift 'ordered justice and rightness of soul, and holy recesses of the mind, and a heart filled with noble generosity,'⁴ and Persius realized this well and wisely. He subjected to ridicule the fact that there is 'gold in temples, that puppets are donated by a maiden to Venus.'⁵ These things Persius despised perhaps for their minuteness. He did not see that the statues themselves and the likenesses of the gods, made by the hands of Polycleitus, Euphanor, and Phidias⁶ from gold and ivory, were nothing other than grand puppets, not given by maids to whose play pardon can be given, but dedicated by bearded men. Rightly, therefore, does Seneca deride even the foolishness of old men. 'We are not,' he says 'boys twice as the saying goes, but always, with this difference, however, that we play bigger games (as old men).'⁷ So at these games they bring ointments to the ornate and grand puppets, and incense, and spices; they immolate to them rich and costly victims. Indeed, the puppets have a mouth, but they lack teeth; theirs is a peplos and precious cloak, but they have no use for a veil; men consecrate gold and silver to them, and those who accept do not possess as much as those who make the donation.

⁴ Persius, 2.73-74.

⁵ *Ibid.* 69,70.

⁶ Great names in the history of Greek sculpture: Polycleitus, native of Argos, and a reputed pupil of Ageladas of Argos; a younger contemporary of the great Phidias; Euphranor, a sculptor and painter who settled in Athens, dated by Pliny around 364 B.C.; Phidias, the great Athenian sculptor of the Age of Pericles, creator of huge bronze statues, the *Athena Promachus* of the Acropolis being the most noted.

⁷ *Frg.* 121.

Not without reason did Dionysius, the tyrant of Sicily, when he had gained possession of Greece after the victory, despise, despoil, and deride such gods, if he really did follow his sacrilegious acts with jokes and jeers. For when he had torn off the golden cloak⁸ from Olympian Jupiter, he ordered one of wool to be placed on him, saying that the gold was heavy for the summer and cold for the winter, but that the wool would be suitable for both seasons. Likewise, when he took the gold beard from Aesculapius, he said it was unfitting and unfair (since Apollo, the god's father, was still unbearded and smooth), for the son to be seen bearded before the father. Likewise, he took off the cups, and spoils, and certain small trinkets which were held in the outstretched hands of the images, and said that he would accept them from them, not take them away from them, for it would be extremely foolish and ungrateful not to want to accept the offer from those willingly making the offer, to whom men were praying for favors for themselves. He did these things with impunity because he was a king and conqueror, but, in addition, customary good fortune followed him, for he lived until he reached old age and passed the kingdom from his hands to those of his son.⁹ In this, however, because men were not able to avenge the crimes of a tyrant, it was fitting for the gods to be vindicators of themselves. But if a low born man should commit a crime of any sort, there are always at hand for him clubs, stakes, racks, crosses, and whatever it may please those angered and raging to think up.

Now when men punish those caught in sacrilege, they themselves have no confidence in the power of their gods. I ask why do they not leave the principal task of avenging to them, if they think they have any power? Rather do they think that it is by the divine power of the gods that the plunderers of the sacred things were seized and held, and they rage not so

8 Evidently the statues were clothed with robes of precious materials and the beard referred to in the next sentence may have been of gold braid.

9 Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.34.83.

much with wrath as with fear that, if they do not vindicate the injured honor of the gods, the punishment will fall upon themselves. Surely, they are incredibly foolish to think that the gods will harm them for the crimes of others, gods who through themselves could bring no harm to those by whom they were violated and despoiled. But often, indeed, these gods themselves also have had claims against sacrilegious acts. It is possible that this happened by chance, which is the case sometimes, but not always; a little later,¹⁰ however, I will show how this happened.

Meanwhile, now I ask why men did not make claims against so many and such great sacrilegious acts of Dionysius who, not stealthily, but openly, mocked the gods? Why did they not keep this one, so forward in his irreverences, away from the temples, away from the ceremonies, and away from their own images? Why, moreover, did he sail away prosperously after having taken the sacred objects? Because, of course, he was testifying to the joke as was his wont. 'Do you see,' he said to his companions in fear of shipwreck, 'how prosperous the voyage is rendered for those who commit sacrilege by the immortal gods themselves?'¹¹ Perhaps he had learned from Plato that the gods are nothing.¹²

What about Gaius Verres, whom Cicero, his accuser, compares to this same Dionysius and to Phalaris and to all tyrants?¹³ Did not Verres pillage all of Sicily by taking away the images of the gods and the ornaments of shrines? It is useless to go over the single incidents; it is enough to recall one in which the accuser, with all the powers of his eloquence, and with every effort of his voice and body, deplored the destruction done to a Ceres, either of Catina or Henna.¹⁴ The

¹⁰ Cf. ch. 7.

¹¹ Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.34.83; Valerius Maximus 1.1 ext. 3.

¹² Cf. Cicero, *ibid.* 1.12.30—13.34.

¹³ Cicero's prosecution of Verres for his extortion as provincial governor revealed many of that one's acts of violence against religious objects. Cf. especially *In Verrem* 5.56.145.

¹⁴ Cicero, *In Verrem* 4.45; 48-51. Catina and Henna were towns in Sicily.

religious significance of the first of these¹⁵ was so great that it was a crime for men to approach the secret portions of its temple, and such was the antiquity of the other¹⁶ that all the annalists say that the goddess herself first discovered grains on the soil of Henna, and that it was from this place that her maiden daughter was stolen.¹⁷ Finally, in Gracchan times,¹⁸ when the republic was disturbed by seditions and portents, when it was discovered from the Sibylline Books¹⁹ that the most ancient Ceres was to be placated, envoys were sent to Henna! This Ceres, therefore, either the most religious one, to see whom was not permitted to men even for purposes of adoration, or the most ancient one, whom the Senate and Roman people had placated with sacrifices and gifts, was removed from its secret and ancient inner shrine by robber-slaves sent in with impunity by Gaius Verres. And when the same author was affirming that he had been begged by the Sicilians to take the case of the province, he used these words: 'They did not have even their gods in their cities to whom they might flee, because Gaius Verres had taken their most sacred images from their holiest shrines.'²⁰ Indeed, it was just as though when Verres had taken the gods from their cities and shrines, he had taken them from heaven also. Whence, it is evident that those gods have nothing in themselves more than the material of which they have been made.

Not without reason, Marcus Tullius, did the Sicilians run to you, that is, to a man, since for three years they had experienced that the gods were of no avail. They would have been utter fools if they had fled to gods for defense against the injuries of men, those very gods who could not be angry against Gaius Verres for themselves. But Verres was con-

¹⁵ Cicero, *ibid.* 4.45.99.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 4.48.106.

¹⁷ The rape of Proserpina, daughter of Ceres, by Hades or Pluto, god of the underworld, was a commonplace in ancient mythology.

¹⁸ Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, each of whom led agrarian reform movements, were assassinated in 133 and 122 B.C.

¹⁹ Cf. Bk. I, chs. 6, 7, for Lactantius' theories of the Sibyls.

²⁰ Cicero, *De divinatione* 1.3.

demned for these crimes. Yes, but the gods did not claim vindication; it was the industry of Cicero which either overwhelmed the one's defenders or blocked their prestige. Why is it that, in the case of Verres, a condemnation was not given to him but rather an exemption? It is the same act as Dionysius bearing off the spoils of the gods and receiving from the immortal gods a fair voyage. Why do they seem to have granted to Verres, too, a good sojourn in which to enjoy in tranquillity the benefits of his sacrileges? For afterwards, while civil wars were raging, under pretext of condemnation and removed from all danger and fear, he heard of the grave misfortunes and miserable outcomes of others. And he who alone seemed to have fallen when all others stood, that one in reality stood alone when all others were falling. He stood, until satiated with the wealth gained from his sacrilege, with life, and worn out with age, the proscription of the triumvirate²¹ removed him from life; the very same proscription, incidentally, which removed Cicero, the avenger of the violated majesty of the gods. In fact, even in that he was happy, because before his death he had heard of the most cruel end of his accuser. The gods, it would seem, saw to it that that perpetrator of sacrilege and robber of their religious trappings would not die before he had taken solace from revenge.²²

Chapter 5

How much more correct it is, therefore, to disregard insensible and vain images and to turn the eyes to where is the seat, to where is the abode of the true God! He is the God who supports the earth, who has adorned the sky with gleaming stars, who has illuminated the sun—a most brilliant light for human affairs and a singular witness unto His one majesty—who has spread the seas about the lands, who has charged

²¹ Proscription carried on by Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus.

²² Cf. Cicero, *In Verrem* 4.34.75; 43.95.

the rivers to flow with everlasting roll, and who 'did order the plains to stretch out and the valleys to subside, the woods to be covered with foliage and the rocky mountains to arise.'¹ Surely not Jupiter, he who was born one thousand seven hundred years ago, did all these things, but rather "That maker of things, cause of a better world,"² who is called God, whose beginning since it cannot be comprehended ought not to be even sought. It is enough for man, unto full and perfect wisdom, if he understand that that maker is God. Of this understanding the highest power is this, that it look up to and honor the common parent of the human race and the maker of wonderful things.

Whence do certain people of blunt and dull heart adore the elements, things which have been made and which lack sensibility, as though they were gods? It is because, when they gazed in wonder at the works of God, namely: the sky with its various lights, the earth with its plains and mountains, the sea and rivers, lakes, and springs, struck dumb with admiration at these things, and forgetting their very Maker whom they were not able to see, they began to venerate and worship His works. Nor could they ever understand how much greater and more wonderful is He who made those works out of nothing. Although they see that these things, following divine laws, serve the convenience and uses of man with perpetual necessity, they still think that they are gods. They who prefer His works to God, the most indulgent Father Himself, are ungrateful toward the divine benefits.

But why is it strange if barbarians or uncultured men are in error, when even philosophers of the Stoic school are of the same error, since they hold that all the heavenly bodies which move ought to be counted in the number of the gods? For example, according to Cicero, Lucilius the Stoic speaks thus: 'This constancy of the stars, this so accurate coming together of seasons and times in so varied courses throughout all

¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.43,44.

² *Ibid.* 79.

eternity I cannot understand apart from mind, reason, plan. Since we see that these are present in the stars, we cannot but place them in the number of the gods.’³ Just a little before this he said: ‘It remains that the motion of the stars is voluntary; and he who sees these and yet denies that they are gods acts not only ignorantly but impiously as well.’⁴

We, however, deny it and we do so constantly. And we prove, O philosophers, that you are not only uninstructed and impious, but even blind, foolish, and mad, for you have overcome the ignorance of the unlettered with emptiness. Whereas they considered as gods the sun and moon, you think even the stars are gods. Confide to us, then, the mysterious workings of the stars, so that we might erect altars and temples to each one, so that we might know by what rite and on what day we should worship them, by what names and with what prayers we should call upon them, unless, perhaps, we should worship such innumerable and minute gods all together without any distinction. What strength against opposition has this argument, by which they gather that all celestial beings are gods? For if they think that stars are gods for this reason, because they have certain and reasonable courses, they are mistaken. It is clear that they are not gods, because it is not possible to deprive them of their pre-determined paths. If stars were gods, they would be borne now here and now there, without any necessity, just as living things on the earth—because they are free as to their wills or desires—move about as they please; wherever their mind or purpose directs, there they go. The motion of the stars, then, is not a voluntary but a necessary one, because they observe pre-established laws and functions. But when Lucilius was discussing the courses of the stars, which he knew from the very congruence of events and seasons were not fortuitous, he believed them to be voluntary, reasoning that they could not, as it were, be moved with such pre-

³ Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.21.54.

⁴ *Ibid.* 2.16.44.

cision and order unless there were present in them a sense of their duty or function.

O how difficult is truth to the ignorant and how easy to those who know! 'If the motions of the stars,' he says, 'are not fortuitous, there remains nothing else but that they be voluntary.' Rather, however, as it is manifest that they are not fortuitous, so is it that they are not voluntary either. 'How, then, do they keep their constancy in completing their paths?' In truth, God, the Fashioner of the universe, so disposed them; thus He fixed it that they should course through the divine vaults of heaven in admirable systems in order to effect the various seasons which follow one upon the other. Could Archimedes the Sicilian⁵ have devised from hollowed metal a likeness and figure of the world, in which he so arranged the sun and moon that they should effect unequal motions and those like to the celestial changes for each day, as it were, and display or exhibit, not only the risings and settings of the sun and the waxings and wanings of the moon, but even the unequal courses of revolutions and the wanderings of the stars as that sphere turned, and yet God Himself be unable to fashion and accomplish what the skill of a man could simulate by imitation? Which answer, therefore, would a Stoic give if he had seen the forms of stars painted and reproduced in that sphere? Would he say that they were moved by their own purpose or would he not rather say by the skill of the designer? There is in the stars, therefore, a plan, arranged for the completing of their courses of motion, but it is the plan of God who made and directs all things; it does not belong to the stars which are moved. If the sun wished to stand,⁶ there would

5 A celebrated mathematician of Syracuse to whom mankind is indebted for the ratio between a cylinder and a sphere, the invention of the water-screw, and several principles on balances or levers. His planetarium (sphere) was taken to Rome where it was seen by Cicero (*Rep.* 1.22.22) and probably by Ovid (*Fasti* 6.277).

6 It was not until after the time of Copernicus and Galileo that the correct notions as to the movements of the planets about the sun were accepted or generally known. Lactantius is no better informed scientifically than men of his day could be.

be perpetual daylight. Likewise, if the stars did not have motions, who doubts that there would have been everlasting night? But as there are turns of day and night, God wished them to be moved, and moved so variously that there were made, not only alternations of light and darkness, but also of cold and heat, so that the force and power needed for generating and maturing crops might unite. Since the philosophers did not see this 'cleverness' of the divine power in devising the course of the stars, they thought of the stars as living beings, animals that advanced on foot and of their own accord, not by divine plan. Now who does not know why God thought such courses up? Certainly, lest night, when the light of the sun departs, should grow increasingly black, and with its loathsome horrible darkness harm living beings. At the same time, as He adorned the sky with marvelous variety, He tempered the very darkness with many minute lights. How much more wise, then, was Naso, who felt that those lamps were set there by God to dispel the horror of darkness, than those who rate themselves as pursuers of wisdom. In his book called the *Phaenomena*, he shows a grasp of this and with these three verses he concluded:

So many and such a number of images God placed
with design in the sky; and sprinkled through the
black darkness, He ordered them to give clear light
to the frosty night.⁷

But if it is not possible for the stars to be gods, then, indeed, the sun and the moon cannot be gods either, since they only differ from the lights of the stars in magnitude, but not in quality. And if these are not gods, therefore, neither is the sky in which they are all contained. In a similar manner,⁸ if the ground which we tread upon, which we dig up, and which we cultivate for a living is not a god, then neither will the plains and mountains be gods; if these are not, then not even the

⁷ Ovid. Cf. Baehrens, *Fragmenta Poetarum Romanorum* p. 349.

⁸ In the Migne edition Chapter 6 begins here, and, therefore, there is a discrepancy in chapter numbering of the two texts from here on.

entire earth can seem to be a god. Likewise, if water which is at the service of living creatures for drinking and washing is not a god, neither, indeed, are the springs from which the water flows forth; if the springs are not, the streams which are gathered from the springs are not; if the streams also are not gods, then the sea, too, which forms from the streams cannot be regarded as a god. So if neither sky nor land nor sea, which are the parts of the world, cannot be gods, not even the entire universe, therefore, is a god; yet this very universe, the Stoics maintain, is living and knowing and, therefore, a god.

In this belief they have been so inconsistent that there is nothing which has been said by them which has not been turned about by themselves. They argue thus: It is not possible for something to lack sense which generates sensible objects from itself. The world generates man, who is endowed with sense, and is himself, therefore, sensible. Likewise, it is not possible for that to be without sense, a part of which has sense. Therefore, because man is sensible, in the world of which man is a part, there is sense. Indeed, these propositions are true. That thing is sensible which begets something endowed with sense; and that has sense, a part of which is increased with sense. But they are false assumptions with which they conclude the arguments, because neither does the world generate man, nor is man a part of the world. For from the beginning the same God made man who made also the world, and man is not part of the world as a member of the body. It is possible for the world to be without man, just as it is for a city and a house to be without a man. But as a house is the habitation of one man and the city the dwelling place of one people, so the world is the domicile of the entire human race; that which is inhabited is one thing and that which inhabits is another. While they were eager to confirm, however, that which they had falsely undertaken, that the world was sensible and a god, they did not see the consequence of their arguments. For if man is part of the world, and if the

world is sensible because man is sensible, then, because man is mortal, it is necessary that the world be mortal, too, and not only mortal, but subject to all ills and sufferings. And, contrariwise, if the world is a god, and its parts surely immortal, then man is a god, too, because he is part of the world, as you say. If man, then beasts of burden and cattle and the other kinds of beasts and birds and fishes, since these, too, feel or sense in the same way and are parts of the world. This is tolerable; for the Egyptians worship even these things. But the matter reaches such a point that frogs and mosquitoes and ants seem to be gods, because there is in these, too, a sense and they are part of the world.

So always arguments sought from falsity have foolish and absurd outcomes. Why is it that they say that the same world, because of both men and gods, has been constructed as though a common home? The world, therefore, is neither god nor animal. If it has been fashioned or constructed (for an animal is not constructed, but born), and if it has been built, then it is as a house or a ship. There is, therefore, some designer or fashioner of the world who is God, and He will be apart from the world which He made, and the world which has been made will be separate. Now how repulsive and absurd is the fact that when they affirm the celestial fires and the other elements of the world to be gods, they say that the same world is a very god! How is it possible for one god to be made from a pile of many gods? If the stars are gods, the universe cannot be a god, but the domicile of gods. But if the universe is a god, then all those things which are in it are not gods, but members of a god, and certainly they cannot receive the name of god alone. No one can say rightly that the members of one man are many men. But there is no similar comparison of animals and the universe, for because the animal is endowed with sense, his members also have sense, nor do they lose this state of sensibility unless they are severed from the body. To what thing, then, does the universe show similarity? To be sure, those who do not deny that it has been made, teach that it is

the common home, as it were, of gods and men. If it is constructed as a home, then, it itself is not a god, nor are its elements which are its parts, because a home is not able to have dominion over itself nor of those parts of which it consists. Therefore, not only by the truth, but by their own words, are they convicted. For just as a house, made for the purpose of habitation, feels nothing of itself and is subjected to its master, the one who made it or who dwells in it, so the universe, feeling nothing of itself, lies subject to God its Maker, who made it for His own use.

Chapter 6

In a double way, therefore, sin is committed by those foolish ones, first, because they prefer the elements, that is, works of God, to God, and next, because they worship images of those very elements conceived in human form. They form representations of the sun and moon in human fashion; also of the fire, and earth, and sea, which they call Vulcan, Vesta, and Neptune, and they do not sacrifice to these elements in the open. Such great cupidity of images holds men that those which are true are considered of less worth, for men are delighted with gold, gems, and ivory. The beauty and charm of these bind the eyes, and they do not think that there is any religion where they do not shine. So under the cloak of the gods, it is greed and avarice which they worship. Men believe that the gods love whatever they desire strongly, whatever it is for which thefts, murders, and crimes rage daily, and on account of which wars overthrow peoples and cities throughout the world. They consecrate, therefore, to these gods their booty and rapine who, of necessity, are feeble and unpossessed of great virtue if they are subject to these desires. Why should we think them celestial if they desire something of earth, or blessed if they have need of anything, or incorrupt

if they have a passion for those things in seeking which the cupidity of men is rightly condemned? They come to the gods, then, not so much by reason of religion, which can be no religion in things badly gained and corruptible, but that they may take in gold with their eyes, behold the gleam of smooth marble or ivory, and handle with insatiable contemplation garments studded with stones or brilliant with colors and goblets adorned with shining jewels. And the more ornate the temples and the more beautiful the statues, so much the more the majesty with which they are credited. Their religion is nothing else than that which human cupidity admires. These are the religions which, handed down to them from their ancestors, they persist in protecting and defending; they do not consider what sort they are, but they trust that they are true and approved from the fact that their ancestors handed them down. So great is the authority of antiquity that it is regarded as a crime to search into it. And so there is trust put in it here and there as though it were understood truth. In fine, in Cicero, Cotta speaks thus to Lucilius: 'You have, Balbus, what Cotta, what the pontifex thinks. Now make me understand what you think: for I ought to receive a reason for religion from you, a philosopher, but in our ancestors I ought to place trust, even though no reason is rendered.'¹

If you believe, why, then, do you seek a reason which may cause you not to believe? If you think that a reason ought to be sought then you do not believe. You so seek, then, that you may follow it when you have found it. The reason shows you that the religions of the gods are not true, so what will you do? Will you follow your ancestors, or reason, which, indeed, has not been insinuated into you by another, but has been discovered and raised up by you yourself, when you dug out all the religious principles from their roots (in your searching for reasons)? If you choose reason, it is necessary for you to depart from the institutions and authority of your ancestors,

¹ *De natura deorum* 3.2.6.

since that alone is right which reason prescribes. But if devotion persuades you to follow the ancestors, then confess that they were fools who served contrived religions that were against reason, and that you are silly who worship this because you are convinced that it is false. However, since the name of our ancestors is placed before us in so great a manner, let us see finally who those ancestors were from whose authority it is a crime to depart.

Romulus, when he was about to found his city, called together the shepherds among whom he had grown up, and when the number seemed much too inadequate for the founding of a city, he arranged an asylum. To this there rushed from here and there in the neighboring regions all the worst people without any distinction of condition. From all this conglomeration he formed a people and picked for the Senate those who preceded in age, and he called them Fathers, by whose counsel he would carry on all matters.² Of this Senate, Propertius, the writer of elegies, has this to say:

The shepherd's horn summoned the early Quirites
to the words; that hundred often in the meadow was the
senate. The curia, which now ranks high, a bordered-
togae'd senate, had skins then, rustic hearts, those
Fathers.³

These are the fathers whose decrees erudite and wise men very devoutly observe, and all posterity judges as true and immutable—that which a hundred old men clad in skins wished to be a statute. However, these were seduced by Pompilius, as was mentioned in the first book,⁴ so that they believed the sacred rites which he himself handed down were true. It is a fact, however, that their posterity regard with such great value the authority of men whom, when they lived, no one, high or low, judged worthy of relationship.

² Cf. Livy, 1.8.

³ 5.1.11-13.

⁴ Bk. I, ch. 22.

Chapter 7

Wherefore, in that matter especially, in which the purpose of life is concerned, it is necessary for each one to have confidence in himself and rely upon his own judgment and personal opinions for investigating and weighing out the truth, rather than believe in the errors of others and as though utterly gullible and lacking in wisdom, to be deceived. To all, according to their capacity as men, God gave wisdom in order that they might seek out things not heard of and weigh out things heard of. Those who have gone before us in time have not (because of their superiority in age) gone before us also in wisdom; for if wisdom is given to all fairly and proportionally, it is not possible for it to be laid hold of by those going before. It is intangible and inexhaustible as though it were the light and brightness of the sun, because as the sun is of the eyes, so is wisdom the light of the human heart. So since being wise, that is, seeking the truth, is innate in all, they snatch wisdom away from themselves who, without any exercise of judgment, accept with approval the findings of their ancestors and those who are led by others in the manner of the beasts. Their error lies in this, that once the name of the ancestors has been posited, they think that it is impossible either for themselves to have any more of understanding of the matter because they are named the descendants, or for those to have been lacking in any understanding of the matter because they are named the ancestors. What, then, impedes us from taking the example from them—that just as they handed down to posterity the false things which they had come upon, so we who have found the truth should pass on better things to our posterity?

There remains a mighty question,¹ the discussion of which comes not from natural genius but from science. It will have to be explained several ways lest any doubt remain what-

¹ Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 7.3.

soever. Perhaps someone may run for refuge to those tales which are handed down by many authors, reputable ones at that, that those very ones which we have shown are not gods at all have very often displayed their majesty by prodigies, dreams, auguries, and oracles. Many things, in fact, worthy of the term 'miraculous' can be enumerated. First, there is the case of Attus Navius, the chief augur who warned Tarquin the Proud to undertake nothing new unless the augur had been first consulted. The king, making light of the truth of his art, said to him that, after the birds were consulted, he should report to him as to whether what he had conceived in his mind could be done. When Navius affirmed that it could, he said: 'Take this flint stone then, and cut it apart with a knife.' Without the slightest delay that one took the flint and split it.²

Then, we have the story that Castor and Pollux in the Latin War were seen near the Lake of Juturna washing the sweat off their horses, when their temple, which had been connected with the spring, opened of its own accord.³ The same two, during the Macedonian War riding on white horses, are said⁴ to have appeared to Publius Vatienus on his way to Rome at night, telling him that on that day the Persian king had been conquered and taken. A few days later letters from Paulus confirmed that this was true.

It is also a marvelous thing that the image of Fortuna Muliebris is reputed⁵ to have spoken, and not once. Likewise, the image of Juno Moneta, after the Veii were captured, when one of the soldiers sent to carry it jokingly and playfully asked her whether she wished to go to Rome, answered in the affirmative.

The story of Claudia also is set forth as an example of the miraculous. For when, as is in the Sibylline Books, the Idaean

² Cf. Livy, 1.36.

³ Cf. Valerius Maximus, 1.8.1.

⁴ *Ibid.* 1.8.4.

⁵ *Ibid.* 1.8.3 (from Livy, 5.22).

Mother had been summoned, and the ship in which she was carried was stuck in the shallows of the Tiber and was not being moved by any force, they said that Claudia, who had always been regarded as shameless because of excessive adornment of the body, prayed to the Great Mother goddess on bended knees, that if she judged her to be chaste, to follow her girdle. And so the ship, which was not able to be moved by all the youths, was moved by one woman. There is an equally marvelous story,⁶ that when the plague was raging, Aesculapius, summoned from Epidaurus, is claimed to have freed Rome from a long-lasting plague.

Sacrileges also can be enumerated by the evident punishments by which the gods are believed to have avenged their injury. When Appius Claudius, the censor,⁷ transferred the sacred functions of Hercules to the public slaves, he was deprived of his eyes, and the tribe of the Potitii, which proclaimed him, became extinct within the space of one year. When Fulvius,⁸ also a censor, removed the marble tiles from the temple of Juno Lacinia to cover the statue of Equestrian Fortuna which he had made at Rome, his mind was affected, and losing two sons in the Illyrian War, he was consumed with extreme grief of heart. Similarly, Turullius, who, when he was prefect of Mark Antony, had built a fleet at Coos by demolishing the grove of Aesculapius, was killed later in the same spot by the soldiers of Caesar.⁹ To these examples is added that of Pyrrhus, who, after he had taken money from the treasury of Proserpina Locrensis, suffered shipwreck and was dashed upon the shores of the goddess nearby, with the result that nothing except that money was found unharmed.¹⁰ Milesian Ceres also gained much veneration for herself with men.¹¹ When the city was captured by Alexander and the men had

6 *Ibid.* 1.8.2 (cf. the Epitome of Livy, Bk. 11).

7 *Ibid.* 1.1.17 (from Livy, 9.29).

8 *Ibid.* 1.1.20 (from Livy, 42.3).

9 *Ibid.* 1.1.19.

10 *Ibid.* 1.1 ext. 1 (from Livy, 29.18).

11 *Ibid.* 1.1 ext. 5.

rushed in to despoil it, a sudden flash of lightning blinded the eyes of all.

There are also found dreams which seem to show the power of the gods. To Tiberius Atinius, a man of plebeian status, Jupiter is said to have presented himself during sleep and charged him to announce to the consuls and the Senate at the next circus games that the dance leader was displeasing to the god, because a certain Autronius Maximus had led a whipped slave to torture under the yoke through the midst of the circus, and, therefore, it would be necessary for the games to be started anew. When that one had neglected to do this, on the next day his son died and he himself was seized with a serious sickness. When he again beheld the same vision, it asked him whether he had paid enough of a penalty for neglecting a command. So borne on his litter to the consuls, he exposed the whole matter to the Senate, and then recovered his health and returned home on his own feet.¹² The dream by which Augustus Caesar is said to have been saved is also no less worthy of wonder.¹³ During the Civil War with Brutus, on an occasion when he decided to refrain from battle because he was afflicted with a serious sickness, a vision of Minerva came before his physician, Artorius, warning him that Caesar should not remain in camp because of his sickness. So he was carried to the front on his couch, and that same day the camp was taken by Brutus. Many like instances besides can be brought forth, but I am afraid that if I delay any longer in the setting forth of contrary things, I shall seem to be forgetful of my purpose or I shall incur the charge of loquacity.

Chapter 8

I shall set forth now, therefore, the plan or arrangement of those things whereby difficult and obscure things may be

¹² *Ibid.* 1.7.4 (Livy 2.36).

¹³ *Ibid.* 1.7.1.

understood more easily, and I will reveal all these baffling confusions of simulated divine power by which men have been drawn to recede too far from the way of truth. I shall also go far back over ground already covered and quite deeply, so that if anyone devoid of the truth and ignorant should come to read, he may be instructed to understand what finally is the 'head and cause of these evils,'¹ and with the light thus gained, he may perceive his errors and those of the whole human race.

Since God was most provident for planning and most skillful for making, even before He began the work of this world, and since the fount of full and consummate goodness was in Himself as it is always, in order that goodness, as though a stream, might spring from that fount and flow far, He produced a Spirit like to Himself which was endowed with the virtues of God the Father. How He meant this we shall try to explain in the fourth book.² Then He made another in whom the nature of the divine origin did not remain. And so this creation was infected as though by poison with envy of its own fashioning. The latter one passed from goodness to evil by its own will, and that which had been given it free by God, took up a name contrary to itself.³ Whence it is clear that ill will (or envy) is the source of all evils. There was in that one envy of his predecessor, who by persevering was then approved of by God the Father and is still dear to Him. The Greeks call this one, who became evil from good through himself, the devil. We call him the Criminator (Blamer), because the evils and reproaches into which he himself seduces, he blames on God. God, then commencing the making of the world, placed that first and greatest son over the whole work, and at the same time used him as His counselor and artificer in planning, ordering, and completing things, since he was perfected with foresight and reason and power. This will be

¹ Vergil, *Aeneid* 11.361.

² Bk. IV, chs. 6,8.

³ God's creation of the angelic natures who rebelled is referred to here. The reference is to the etymological significance of the name used for devil. The word is *diabolon*.

touched upon now but slightly, because in another place⁴ we will have to expound his virtue and his name and his reason.

No one questions from what materials God made those works so great and so magnificent, for He made all things from nothing. The poets are not to be listened to who say that in the beginning there was chaos, that is, confusion of things and elements, that later on God divided all that mass, and that when the single parts had been separated from the heap of confusion and arranged in order, He fashioned the world and ornamented it in like manner.⁵ It is easy to answer these who have no understanding of the power of a God whom they believe unable to do anything unless there is material lying at hand and prepared. Even the philosophers shared this error. Cicero, discussing the nature of the gods, speaks thus: 'Firstly, therefore, it is not probable that the matter of things whence all things have sprung was effected by divine providence, but that it has and had its own nature and power. For when a carpenter is going to make anything, he does not himself make the material, but he uses that which is prepared, and the moulder likewise uses wax; so for that divine providence it was necessary for the material to be at hand, not that which providence itself made, but that which it had ready at hand. Now if the material was not made by God, then even the earth and water and air and fire have not been made by God.'⁶

O how many are the faults in these ten lines! In the first place, he who in other discussions and in nearly all his books was an assertor of providence and who with the keenest arguments impugned those who said that there was not providence, the same man is now some betrayer or deserter, as it were, trying to do away with providence. If you wish to oppose him on this point, there is need for neither thought nor labor. His own words ought to be recited to him; for Cicero is not refuted more vehemently by any one than by Cicero. But let us

⁴ Bk. IV, ch. 6ff.

⁵ Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.7,8; 21; 32-34.

⁶ Frg. 2.

concede this to the custom and institution of the Academics, that very free men may say and feel what they please: we will consider the opinions themselves. 'It is not,' he says, 'probable that the material of things was made by God.' By what proofs do you explain this, for you have said nothing whereby this may be probable? It seems to be the contrary or especially probable, and not at all rash, indeed, to one thinking that there is something more in God, whom you reduce certainly to the weakness of man, and to whom you grant nothing other than His workmanship. I ask from what man, then, will that divine power differ, if, as man, so also God needs the work of another? He needs it, indeed, if He can fashion nothing unless the material be supplied Him by another. And if this is the case, He is surely of imperfect virtue, and the fashioner of the material must be judged the more powerful now. By what name, then, will he be called who surpasses God in power, inasmuch as it is certainly a greater thing to fashion one's own product than to arrange another's? If, however, it is not possible for anything to be more powerful than God, who must be of perfect virtue, power, and reason, He is, therefore, the same moulder of the material as of the things fashioned from the material, and there could not be, nor should there be, anything not made or wanted by God.

'But it is probable,' Cicero says, 'for the material of things both to have and to have had its own nature and power.' What power could it have, no one granting it? What nature, no one operating it? If it had power, it took it from someone. From whom could it take it, but from God? If it had nature, which is certainly named from being born, it was born. By whom, then, except by God, could it be procreated? For nature, by which you say that all things have arisen, if it has no plan or purpose, can effect nothing. If, however, it has the potency of generating and making, then it has plan and purpose, and, therefore, it is, of necessity, God. Nor can that power be called by any other name in which there is both the providence of planning and the skill and power of doing. Hence, better is

Seneca, the most acute of all the Stoics, who saw nature to be nothing else than God. 'Therefore,' he says, 'will we not praise God to whom virtue is natural. Neither did He learn it from any one. Indeed, we will praise Him the more. For although it is natural to Him, He gave it to Himself, since God Himself is nature.'⁷

Since, therefore, you attribute the origin of things to nature and take it away from God, 'sticking in the same mire, Geta, you pay by borrowing.'⁸ For you deny that this can be done by the very same one by whom you acknowledge that it is patently done, changing the name. A most inept comparison follows: 'Just as a carpenter,' Cicero says, 'when he is going to build anything, does not himself make the material, but uses that which is ready, and a moulder likewise uses wax; so it was necessary for material to be at hand for that divine providence, not that which it itself made but that which it had ready.' But not at all, in truth, was it necessary. For God will be of less power, if He makes anything from something prepared, which is within the province of men. A carpenter will build nothing without wood because he is not able to make the wood itself; the 'not being able to' is a sign of human weakness. God makes the material for Himself, because He is able to: the 'being able to' is of God, for if He is not able, He is not God. Man makes from that which is, because he is weak through his mortality and through the weakness of a limited and moderate power. God, however, makes from that which is not, because He is strong through His eternity and through the strength of an immense power which lacks limit and measure, just as does the life of the Maker. Why, then, is it strange if God should intend to make the world before He prepared the material from which He made it and if He prepared it from that which is not? It would not be right for God to borrow anything from anything or any place, since from Him

⁷ Frg. 122.

⁸ Terence, *Phormio* 5.2.15f.

or in Him all things are.⁹ If anything existed before Him, if anything was made and not by Him, it will lose the power and name of God. But no material has ever been made as God, who from material has made this world.

Thus, two principles are established, eternal and even contrary one to the other. Such cannot be the case without discord and destruction, for those things whose force and reason are diverse must collide. So the two could not be eternal if they are opposed, for it is necessary that one overcome the other. Therefore, it is not possible for the nature of the eternal to be otherwise than simple, so that from it all things may emanate as from a source. Thus, either God sprang from matter, or matter from God. Which of these is true is easily comprehended. Of these two one is sensible; the other lacks sense. It is not possible for the power of making something to exist except in that which is sensible, which discerns, which thinks, and which is moved. Nor is it possible for anything to be begun, or to become, or to be consummated, unless it has been foreseen by reason, both in what way it should come to be before it is, and in what way it should remain after it has been effected.

Finally, he makes something who has the will to make and the might for fulfilling that which he wished. That which is insensible lies always inactive and torpid; nothing can arise from where there is no voluntary motion. If every living thing exists by a reason or plan, certainly it cannot arise from that which is not endowed with reason; nor can that be received from any place which is not there whence it is sought. It should not move anyone, however, that certain animals seem to spring from the earth. For it is not this earth which of itself produces them, but the spirit of God, without which nothing is produced. God, therefore, is not from matter, since it is never possible for something endowed with sense to arise from the insensible, that wisdom should come from the brute, the impassible from the passible, and the spiritual from the

⁹ Cf. Rom. 11.36.

bodily; but, rather, matter is from God. Anything with a solid and tangible body receives power from an external force. Because it received its strength, it is dissoluble; because it is dissolved, it will decay; because it dies, it is necessary that it have been sprung; because it began, it had a fount whence it arose, that is, some maker with sense, foresight, and the skill of making. That maker is certainly no other than God. Since He possesses sense, reason, providence, power, and virtue, He is able to create and effect animate and inanimate things because He knows how each thing ought to be made.

Matter, on the other hand, cannot always have been, because it would not have suffered change if it had been. For what has always been, does not cease to always be, and whence there was no beginning, it is also necessary that there be no end. Why, it would be easier for that which had a beginning to lack an end than that which lacked a beginning to have an end. If matter, therefore, has not been made, it is not possible for anything to be made from it; if it is not possible for anything to be made from it, there will not even be matter, for matter is that from which something is made. Everything, however, from the time that it is made, since it receives the hand or power of the workman, is destroyed and begins to be something else. Therefore, since matter had an end when the world was made from it, it had a beginning also. For what is destroyed was built; what is dissolved was bound together; what is ended was begun. If matter, then, is gathered to have had a beginning from its commutation and end, from whom else could it have been, except from God?

It is God alone, therefore, who has not been made, and for this reason He can destroy other things, and He Himself cannot be destroyed. That which He was will remain always in Him, because He was not generated from another, nor does His beginning and origin depend on any other thing, which being changed might dissolve Him. He exists of Himself, as we said in the first book¹⁰ and, therefore, He is such as He wishes

¹⁰ Bk. I, chs. 7,13.

to be, impassible, immutable, incorrupt, blessed, and eternal. Now, in truth, that conclusion by which Cicero ended his remarks is much more absurd. 'For if the material,' he said, 'was not made by God not even have the earth and water and air and fire been made by God.' How cleverly he has sped past the danger. For thus did he assume that earlier statement (that of the protasis in the conditional sentence) as if it did not need proof, when that was much more uncertain, than that on account of which it was assumed. 'If matter,' he said, 'was not made by God, neither was the world made by God.' He preferred to gather from falsity what is false than what is true from truth; and, although uncertain things ought to be proved from certainties, this one took his proof from an uncertainty to overturn what was certain. The world was made by Divine Providence. Though I may be silent about Trismegistus,¹¹ who declares this, and though I make no mention of the songs of the Sibyls which tell the same thing, and though I pass over the prophets who testify to the work of the world and the workmanship of God with one voice and like spirit, such is agreed on by nearly all philosophers. The Pythagoreans, Stoics, and Peripatetics hold it, and these are the principal schools of philosophy. Finally, it was held as an acknowledged and indubitable fact by those first seven wise men up to Socrates and Plato even, until the mad Epicurus arose many ages after, and dared to deny that which is most evident, with a zeal and desire of inventing new beliefs, so that he might set up a system under his own name.¹² Although he could find nothing new, yet, in order that he might disagree with the others, he wanted to overthrow the old, and in this all the philosophers barking around him took up the argument.

It is more certain, therefore, that the world was fashioned by providence than that matter was piled together by providence. Wherefore, it was not necessary to reckon on this

11 These pagan and mythological witnesses have been treated in detail in Bk. I.

12 Cf. F. C. Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy* Vol. I, for a full discussion of Epicurus and his tenets.

account that the world was not made by Divine Providence because its material has not been made by Divine Providence, but because the world has been effected by Divine Providence, so also has its material been divinely made. For it is more credible that the matter was made by God, since God can do all things, rather than that the world was not made by God, since without mind, reason, and plan nothing can be made. This is not the fault of Cicero but of the sect. For when he undertook the discussion whereby he was to exalt the nature of the gods about which the philosophers were prating, he thought that all divinity should be lifted from ignorance of the truth. Now, since the gods were not, he could take them away. When he attempted, however, to overthrow with failing arguments the divine providence which is in the one God, because he had begun to lean against truth, he fell of necessity into the pit whence he could not extricate himself. Here, in clinging to this point then, I believe that he was fixed, since Lucilius, who was on the opposite side of the discussion, remained silent. This is a hinge; here all questions are turned. Cotta will unravel himself from this maze if he can. He may put forth the arguments by which he may teach that matter always was, which no providence brought about. He may put forth how anything weighty or heavy, either could be without an author or would have the ability to remain unchanged, and cease to be what it always was, in order that it might begin to be what it never was. If he should show this, then at last, I would agree that not even the world was arranged by Divine Providence and yet, I would agree in such a way that I would catch him in other snares; for he will be thrown back on the same point which he does not want. He would say that both the matter of which the world is, and the world which is of matter, have existed by nature, while I hold that nature itself is God.

Now it is not possible to make wondrous works, that is, those consisting of the greatest purpose and plan, unless one possess mind, providence, and power. Thus it shall be that, as God

made all things, it is not possible for anything to be at all which has not drawn its origin from God. But as often as the same one is an Epicurean and claims that the world was not made by God, he is wont to question by what hands, by what machines, by what levers, and by what means of building, He did this so great work.¹³ He would see perhaps if he could have been around at the time in which God did it. But lest man should watch the works of God, He did not want to bring him into this world until all things were perfected. Moreover, he could not even be brought in; for how would he exist with the sky being made above and the earth being established below, when, perhaps, moist things, stiffening with excessive cold, were congealing or were hardening by being cooked and roasted with the heat of fire? Or how would he live if the sun was not yet established, or if fruits and animals had not yet begun? It was necessary, therefore, for man to be made last of all, since now his highest power has been placed over the world and the other things. Finally, the holy writings show that man was the last work of God, and that he was so brought into this world as into a house already prepared and furnished; for it was for his sake that all things were made. The poets also tell the same thing. Ovid, when in his account of how the world had already been finished and all the animals formed added this:

A more sacred animal than these, and one more capable of deep thought was still missing, and because he was to be able to lord over the others, man was born.¹⁴

So it must be considered wrong to investigate those matters which God wished to keep concealed. But that one was not searching with a desire of hearing or learning but of refuting, since he was confident that no one was able to say this, just as though it should be believed from this [kind of argument] that these things were not divinely made, since it cannot be fathomed how they were made. Now if you had been led into

¹³ Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.8.19f.

¹⁴ *Metamorphoses* 1.76ff.

a house, built and furnished, and had seen no building materials, would you have thought that that house was not built by man, since you do not know in what way it is built? You would ask the same thing of the house, I suppose, which you now require of the world: by what hands, with what implements did man construct such great works? And you would ask this especially if you saw huge stones, immense cement blocks, vast columns, the entire work reaching high above. Would not these things seem to you to exceed the measure of human strength, inasmuch as you would not know that they were not done so much by strength as by reason, plan, and skilled workmanship? But if man, in whom nothing is perfect, accomplishes more by reason than his slight strength allows, for what reason should it seem incredible to you when the world is said to have been made by God, in whom, because He is perfect, wisdom can have no limit nor fortitude a measure? His works are seen by the eyes, but how He did them is seen not even by the mind, because as Hermes says, it is not possible for mortal to approach the immortal, temporal the perpetual, corruptible the incorrupt, that is, to go near and to follow with the intelligence.¹⁵ Therefore, a still earthly being does not grasp the perception of heavenly things, because it is held walled in by the body as though by a guard; it but beholds all things with the senses not loosed and free. Let him know, then, how foolishly he acts who seeks out unexplainable matters. For this is the measure of his condition—to pass over and not to understand but to the point that it is permitted to man to approach. Finally, when God revealed the truth to man, He wished us to know those things alone which it was of benefit for man to know for attaining life. The things which pertained to curiosity and profane desires, He held back, that they might be secrets. Why, then, do you seek what you are not able to know, and what, if you knew it, would not make you any happier? Wisdom in man is perfect if it knows both that God is one and that all things were made by Him.

¹⁵ Cf. Cyril, *C. Iulianum* I, 6.31C-32A.

Chapter 9

Now, since we have refuted those who hold opinions contrary to the truth concerning the world and God, its Maker, we shall return to the divine workmanship of the world which is handed down in the hidden writings of holy religion. God made the heavens first of all and suspended them high above because His abode, the throne of God the Creator, was there. Then He established the earth and placed it under the sky, as the habitation of man with the other kinds of animals. He wished it to be surrounded and held in by moisture. He adorned His dwelling place and filled it with bright lights, the brilliant ornaments that are the sun, the gleaming disc of the moon, and the shining stars.¹ Darkness, however, the opposite of these, He settled upon the earth; for it contains nothing of light of itself except what it received from the heavens where He put perennial light, the heavenly spirits, and perpetual life. Then again, in the earth He placed darkness and the infernal beings and death, and these are as far removed from those higher ones as evil is from good and vices from virtues.

Of the earth itself He also made two parts contrary to and different from one another, the Orient and the Occident. Of these, the Orient is ascribed to God, because He Himself is the fount of light and illuminator of things, and because He causes us to arise to everlasting life; while the Occident is ascribed to that twisted and depraved mind, because it takes away the light, always induces darkness, and because it makes men fall² and perish in sins. As the light is of the Orient, and the purpose of life is concerned with the light, so is the darkness of the Occident, and death and destruction are involved in darkness.

He then measured the other parts, south and north, with the same plan, and these parts are joined in association with the first two. That which is more warmed by the heat of the sun

¹ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 13.4.1.

² Cf. *ibid.* 13.1.4. In the Latin the word *occidere* is used for 'to fall.'

is nearest to and united with its rising, but that which is stiff with cold and perpetual ice is the extreme setting of it. As the darkness is opposed to the light, so is the cold to the heat. And as heat is next to light, so is the south to the east; as cold is to darkness, so is the north to the west. He assigned to these directions each its season: spring to the east, and summer to the southern zone; autumn is the western season, and winter that of the north. In these two parts also, the southern and northern, is contained a figure of life and death, because there is life in heat, death in cold. As heat is from fire, so is cold from water.

According to the measuring of these parts He made day and night also, which periods complete the perpetual, revolving circles of the times, which we call years, by their regular alternating changes. The day, which the rising sun first supplies, must of necessity be of God, as are all the better things, but the night which the final or setting sun brings on is, of course, his whom we have named the rival of God.³ Even in this, God made these two foreknowing the future, so that from them a certain image of true religion and false superstitions might be shown. For just as the sun, which rises into the day, though it be one (whence Cicero holds that it seems to have been named the sun, because it appears alone when the stars are obscured),⁴ because it is a true light and of perfect plenitude, shines upon all things with most strong heat and most brilliant light, so it is in God, though He be One, that majesty and power and clarity are perfect. Night, however, which we say is attributed to that depraved antithesis, shows many and various religious practices through a likeness to that very self. For although innumerable stars seem to shine and spread their rays, they do not put forth any heat nor do they overcome darkness by their number, because they are not full and solid lights. So, too, there are found to be two principal ones, heat

³ Cf. Bk. II, ch. 8, n. 3.

⁴ Cf. *De natura deorum* 2.27.68. The etymology is tempting, *sol* and *solus*. Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 3.71.1; *De natura rerum* 24.1.

and moisture, which have faculties different from and opposed to each other, which God has marvelously devised for sustaining and supporting all things. For since the virtue of God is in heat and fire, if He had not tempered its ardor and strength by a mixture of moisture and coldness, it would not have been possible for anything to be born or to cohere, and whatever had begun to be would immediately perish by the conflagration. Whence certain philosophers and poets have said that 'the world corresponds with discord by concord'⁵ but they did not see the plan very thoroughly.

Heraclitus said that all things came from fire; Thales said from water. Each saw something, but still each one erred. If there were only either of those two things, water could never start from fire, nor again could fire come from water. But it is more true at the same time that all things are generated from a mixture of both. Now fire cannot be mixed with water because both are not congenial, and if they should come together, it would necessarily be that the one which was superior would consume the other. However, their substances can be mingled, for the substance of fire is heat, and of water, moisture. Rightly then, did Ovid say:

Forsooth when heat and moisture assume the proper
mixture,

they conceive and from these two arise all things. And
although fire is opposed to water, a moist vapor creates
all things and a discordant concord is endowed with
offspring.⁶

One element is masculine, as it were, and the other feminine; one is active, the other passive.

And, therefore, from olden times it was an institution that the bonds of wedlock be ratified by a pledge or sign of fire and water,⁷ because the offspring of living beings receive bodily form and are enlivened with heat and moisture. Since every

⁵ Cf. Horace, *Epistles* 1.12.19.

⁶ *Metamorphoses* 1.430-432.

⁷ Cf. Varro, *De lingua latina* 5.61.

living creature consists of soul and body, the matter of the body is in moisture, that of the soul in heat. It is given to know this from the fetuses of birds. Unless the forming heat has swathed them and kept them full of thick moisture, neither will the moisture be able to be formed into a body, nor will the body be given life.

It was also customary for exiles to receive the penalty of being 'interdicted from fire and water,' for it seemed so very wrong hitherto to afflict men, however evil, with capital punishment. Therefore, by using the interdict of those things of which the life of man consists, he who had received that sentence was considered to be charged, as it were, by death. Those two elements were regarded as so primal that without them they believed neither the origin of man nor his life could even be.

Of these two elements, one we have in common with the other animals, the other is given to man alone. Because we are a celestial and immortal species of animals, we use fire which has been given to us as a proof of immortality, because fire is from heaven. The nature of fire, because it is mobile and tends to rise upwards, contains the plan (reason, purpose) of life. Since the other animals are completely mortal, they make use of water only, which is the corporal and earthly element, and the nature of water, because it is mobile and flows downward, shows the likeness of death. The beasts, therefore, neither look up toward heaven nor do they experience any religious sentiments, because the use of fire is foreign to them. These two principles, then, fire and water, whence or in what way God enkindled the one or liquified the other, He alone can know who made them.

Chapter 10

When the world was completed, He commanded the animals

of various kinds and different species to come to being, both great and small. And two of each were made, that is, one of each sex, from the offspring of which the air and land and seas were filled up. To all of these according to their kind God gave sustenance from the earth, that they might be of use to man; some for food, others for clothing, and those of greatest strength for help in tilling the soil whence they are called beasts of burden.¹ And thus, when all things were disposed in a marvelous arrangement, He decided to prepare an eternal kingdom for Himself and to procreate innumerable souls to whom to give immortality. He made a sensible and intelligent likeness to Himself, that is, according to the form of His image,² than which nothing can be more perfect. He fashioned man from the slime of the earth, whence he has been given the name man which means made from the earth.³ So Plato says that the human form is of the divine image,⁴ and it is the Sibyl who says: 'An image is man, not having a correct word.'⁵

With regard to this making of man, the poets also, though in a corrupt way, have nonetheless handed down the same; for they have said that man was made from clay by Prometheus. They were not deceived as to the act, but as to the name of the Maker. For they had not hit upon any of the writings of the truth; but those matters revealed in the teaching of the prophets which were contained in the sacred storehouse of God, gathered from stories and weakened in reliability by obscure opinions (as truth spread among the people is accustomed to be corrupted by various handlings and interpretations, even though no one adds anything to that which he has

1 Cf. Cicero, *De legibus* 1.8.25. The word play is lost in English. Lactantius relates *iumenta* (beasts of burden) to *iuvare* (to help).

2 Gen. 1.27.

3 Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 11.1.4; *De differentiis rerum* 17.47. Lactantius is but one of the ancient authors who were fond of the etymological connection fancied between *homo* and *humus*. Cf. also the Hebrew; the word *Adam* means 'of the (red) earth.'

4 *Republic* 501B, *theoeide*.

5 Frg. 8.402.

heard), they incorporated in their verses. And this, indeed, ineptly, because they gave to man such a marvelous accomplishment as the divine workmanship. For why was it necessary for man to be fashioned from the earth, since he could be begotten in the same way in which Prometheus himself was born of Iapetus?⁶ He who if he was man could beget man, could not make him; but that he was not of the gods, his punishment on the Caucasus Mountain declares. Nor has anyone labeled his father, Iapetus, or the paternal Titan as gods, because the sublimity of power belonged to the house of Saturn alone, through which he attained divine honors for himself and all his posterity.

By many arguments this can be proved to be a fiction of the poets. It is generally accepted that there was a flood for the destruction and removal of evil from the face of the earth. Now the philosophers, poets, and writers of antiquities all speak of this, and in this matter they are quite in accord with the words of the prophets. If, then, a cataclysm thus occurred, so that the evil which had increased among too many might be destroyed, how was Prometheus the maker of man, whose very son, Deucalion, they say was the only one saved on account of his justice? How could one stage and one generation have filled the earth with men so quickly? But, to be sure, they have in such a way corrupted this fact also, as they have that former one since they did not know when or at what time the cataclysm took place on the earth, who for his justice merited to be saved when the human race was perishing, and how or with whom he was saved: all of which the prophets teach. It is clear, therefore, that what they say of the workmanship of Prometheus is false. But since I have said⁷ that the poets were not accustomed to lie outright, but to wrap and obscure what they say with figures, I do not mean that they lied, but that Prometheus formed, first of all, a likeness of

⁶ Prometheus was one of the Titans in Greek mythology, the son of Iapetus and the ocean nymph Clymene. He is famous as a benefactor of mankind for whom he stole fire from heaven.

⁷ Cf. Bk. I, 11.

man from soft and rich clay,⁸ and from that first formation was born the art of fashioning statues and images, if, indeed, it was in the time of Jupiter that temples first began to be erected and new cults of the gods to arise. Thus, truth was colored with falsehood, and that which was considered as made by God, began to be ascribed to man who imitated the divine work.

But the making of a real and living man from the slime of the earth is the work of God. This Hermes also holds, who not only said that 'man was made to the image of God by God,' but also tried to explain how by subtle plan He formed each single member in the body of man, since there is not one of these which is not as well arranged for its necessary usefulness as for its beauty.⁹ Even the Stoics, when they discuss providence try to do this, and in certain places Cicero follows them;¹⁰ this material so abundant and so rich, however, he touches but cursorily. I pass over this matter now because lately I wrote a special book on the subject to Demetrianus, my auditor.

In this place, however, I am not able to pass by that point which certain erring philosophers make, in saying that men and the other animals sprang from the earth without any Maker. Whence that line of Vergil: 'And the earthly race of man raised its head from the hard fields.'¹¹ And they especially who denied the existence of providence were of that opinion.

The Stoics assign the making of living beings to a divine skillfulness. Aristotle freed himself from this labor and annoyance by saying that 'the world always was, and that the human race and other kinds which are in the world had no beginning but always were and always will be.'¹² But when we see all the living things, that heretofore were not, begin

⁸ Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.8.

⁹ Cf. *The Workmanship of God* for Lactantius' full treatment of this theme.

¹⁰ Cf. *De republica* 4; *De legibus* 1.9; *De natura deorum* 2.54f.

¹¹ *Georgics* 2.340.

¹² Cf. Aristotle, *de caelo* 1.10; Cicero, *Academici* 2.38.119; *Disputationes Tuscultanae* 1.28.70.

to exist and cease to be, it necessarily follows that the whole genus began to exist at some time, and at some time it will cease to be, since it had a beginning. All things must be held within three phases, past, present, and future. Of the past is origin; of the present is existence; of the future is dissolution. Each is evident in the case of individual men; for we begin when we are born, and we are while we live, and we cease to be when we die.¹³ From this, too, the ancients had it that there were three Fates: one who lays the warp for the fabric of man's life, the second who weaves, and the third who snaps the thread and finishes it. In the case of the entire race of men, however, because only the present time is apparent, both the past, that is the origin, and the future, that is the dissolution, are implied or gathered from that. For because it is, it is clear that at some time it began—for nothing can be without a beginning—and because it began, it is clear that at some time it will come to an end; for it is not possible for that to be wholly immortal which takes from mortals its existence. Just as we all die individually, or one by one, as it were, it is possible that by some chance we might all perish together. This could be through sterility of the land, which happens in particular instances, or by pestilence spread abroad everywhere, which generally devastates single cities or regions, or from fire cast upon the earth of the sort that is said to have happened under Phaethon,¹⁴ or by means of a flood, such as they relate in the story of Deucalion,¹⁵ when the entire human race save one man was destroyed. If a flood did perchance take place, certainly it could have happened that that one who survived should also perish. But if by the Will of Divine Providence, which cannot be denied, he was preserved for renewing men, it is clear that either the life or the extinction of the human race rests in the power of God. But if the human race

¹³ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.93.

¹⁴ Phaethon is an epithet of the sun.

¹⁵ The story of Deucalion is a mythological parallel of that of Noe. In this case, as in many others, we must attribute Lactantius' preference for the myth to the fact that his apology is written for pagans.

can perish in entirety, since it perishes in parts, it is clear that at some time it began, and fragility thus declares its end also as it likewise shows its beginning. And if these things are true, Aristotle will not be able to defend the point he held, namely, that whereby the world itself had not a beginning. If Plato and Epicurus obtain this from Aristotle, then from Plato and Aristotle, who thought that the world will always be, although they are eloquent, the same Epicurus will force from them, unwilling however, the same point; since it follows that it has also an end. But more of this in the last book.¹⁶ Let us return now to the origin of man.

Chapter 11

They say¹ that by fixed turnings of the heaven and movements of the stars there came to be a certain maturation or stage for producing living things, and that the new earth retaining genital seed put forth from itself certain follicles in the likeness of wombs, concerning which Lucretius said: 'Fitted by the roots to the earth the wombs increased.'² When these had in turn come to maturity, burst by the force of nature, they brought forth young living things. Then the earth itself abounded with a moisture like to milk, and with this aliment the living things were nourished. In what manner, then, could these things bear or avoid the force of cold or heat or be born at all, since the sun burned and the cold froze? 'But, in the beginning of the world,' they say, 'there was neither winter nor summer, but a perpetual temperate climate and equable spring.'³ Why, then, do we see nothing of the sort happening even now? 'Because once it was necessary in order that the living things might be produced; but, after they had

¹⁶ Cf. Bk. 7, ch. 14.

¹ Cf. Cicero, *De legibus* 1.8.24; also Lucretius, 5.783-820.

² Lucretius, 5.808.

³ *Ibid.* 806,818f.

begun to exist, the faculty of generating was granted to them, and the earth ceased to bring forth living beings and the condition of climate was changed.'⁴

O, how easy it is to refute lies! First, nothing can be in the world which does not remain such as it began. For the sun and the moon and the stars were not non-existent then, or since they were existent, it was not that they had no movements, or that no divine moderation which tempered and guided their courses had begun together with themselves. Then, if it is as they say, there must be providence, and thus they fall into the very conclusion that they are especially avoiding. For surely Someone provided for those living beings not yet born, so that they should be born, lest the earth be a desert and remain barren and uncultivated. [But in order that they might be born from the earth without the function of parents, it is necessary that there was a foreseeing with great purpose. Next, in order that moisture, being made solid from the earth, might be formed into the various likenesses of bodies, there was likewise a marvelous and inextricable foreseeing so that from the follicles, by which the likenesses were covered, they would be poured forth as though from the womb of mothers, according to a certain accepted plan of living and sensing.] But let us suppose that this also happened by chance: certainly those things which follow—that the earth flowed continuously with milk, and that the temperature of the air was even—cannot be fortuitous.⁵ If it is established that these things were done on this account, that the recently produced animals might have food or might not be in danger, it must be, by I know not what divine plan, that Someone made the provision. But who is able to effect this provision except God?

Let us see, however, whether this very thing, which they keep saying happened, could have happened, namely, that men were born of the earth. If anyone should consider how

⁴ *Ibid.* 793-796; 826-836.

⁵ *Ibid.* 809-819.

long and in what ways an infant is brought up and trained, he will see at once that those earth-born children could not have been reared without any trainer; for it would have been necessary for them to lie prone for several months until with strengthened limbs they could move themselves and change their position. This can be accomplished scarcely within the space of one year. Now, see whether a child could lie in the same place and in the same manner in which it was placed for many months, and not die, overwhelmed and corrupted by that moisture of the earth which it was supplying for aliment and the excrement of its own body mixed into one? And so nothing else is possible but that a child be brought up by someone; unless, perchance, all animals were not born as young, but fully grown: saying this, however, has never come into their minds.

Therefore, all that reckoning is impossible and empty, if, indeed, it can be called a reckoning by which it is considered that there is no reckoning or plan. For he who says that all things are born of their own accord attributes nothing to Divine Providence; such a one certainly does not make claim for any reckoning but overturns it. If it is possible that not anything can be made without plan, it is clear that there is a Divine Providence, and that which is called plan is proper to it.

God, therefore, the Maker of all things, has made man. Cicero, although inexperienced in divine writings, saw this fact, however, and handed down to us the same principle that the prophets proclaimed in the first book of his work *On Laws*. His words I subjoin: 'This animal, provident, wise, versatile, keen, mindful, full of reason and prudence, which we call man, was created in a certain exceptional condition by the Supreme God. For he alone of so many kinds of animals and natures is a sharer of reason and thought, while all the rest are deprived of these.'⁶ Do you see that a man, however far removed from a knowledge of the truth, still, because he

⁶ *De legibus* 1.7.22.

beheld the image of wisdom, understood that man could not have been created except by God? Still there is need of divine testimonies lest the human ones be not sufficient. The Sibyl also bears witness that man is the work of God:

It is God alone, the founder, who has absolute existence;
He himself established the type of form or kind of men,
He himself compounded the spirit of all, the begetting of
living things.⁷

The sacred writings contain the same things. God, then, performed the office of a real father. He Himself fashioned the body; He Himself breathed in the life by which we breathe and whatever we are is entirely His. How He did this, if it were necessary for us to know, He would have taught us, just as He taught us the other things which brought us knowledge of pristine error and the true light.

Chapter 12

When He had made the male first unto His likeness, He then also formed the woman for a counterpart for the man, so that the union of the two sexes might be able to propagate offspring and people the whole earth. In making man of those two materials, which we said were contrary to each other—fire and water—He concluded and perfected a plan. And when the body was made, He breathed into it a soul of the living source of His spirit which is everlasting, so that it might bear a likeness of the world itself from the contrary unchanging elements. Man, then, consists of a soul and a body, of heaven and earth, as it were, inasmuch as the soul by which we live has its origin from God as though from heaven, and the body from the earth of whose slime we said¹ it was formed.

Empedocles, whom you would not know whether to place

⁷ Fig. 1; 3.27.

¹ Cf. ch. 10.

among philosophers or poets because he wrote on the nature of things in verse, as did Lucretius and Varro among the Romans;² set down four elements: fire, air, water, and earth. Perhaps he followed Trismegistus who said: 'Our bodies are constituted by God of these four elements; for they have in them something of fire, something of air, something of water, something of earth, and yet they are not fire nor air nor water nor earth.'³

This is not, indeed, untrue: for in the flesh there is the principle (*ratio*) of the earth, in the blood that of water or moisture, in the breath that of air, and in the vital heat of the body that of fire.⁴ But neither can the blood be separated from the body as moisture from the earth, nor can living heat be separated from the breath as fire from the air; therefore, in all things are found two elements alone, the whole principle of which is embraced in the making of our bodies.

From diverse and repugnant principles, therefore, man has been made as the world itself from light and darkness and from life and death. The Creator charged these two principles to struggle with each other in man, so that if the soul should win, which is of God, he may be immortal and live in perpetual light; but if the body wins and subjects the soul to its sway, he will live in everlasting shadows and in death. And that power of death is not to extinguish the unjust souls utterly, but to punish them for all eternity. We name that punishment a second death, which is itself, just as immortality is, also perpetual. We define the first death this way: death is the dissolution of the nature of living things, or in this manner: death is the separation of body and soul. Of the second death, we say that it is the enduring of eternal pain, or we hold this: death is the condemnation to eternal punishments of souls according to their merits. This type does not befall

² Cf. Quintilian, 1.4.4.

³ Trismegistus in Stobaeus, *Florilegia* 11.23.

⁴ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 11.1.16; *De differentiis rerum* 17.48.

dumb beasts whose souls which do not 'consist' of God but of common air are dissolved by death.

In this association of heaven and earth, whose likeness has been expressed in man, the things which are of God hold the superior place. As plainly seen, the soul has dominion over the body. The lower part, however, is held by those things which are of the devil. The body, of course, which, because it is earthly, ought to be subject to the soul, as earth is to heaven, serves as a vessel, as it were, which the heavenly spirit uses here as a temporal dwelling place. Each has its duties, that which is of heaven and God should rule and that which is of earth and the devil should obey. This did not escape that rogue of a Sallust who said: "All our power is placed in our souls and bodies; we use commanding of our souls and obeying rather of our bodies."⁵ That one would have lived very rightly if he had lived according to this statement of his, but he served the most shameful passions and annulled that very statement by the depravity of his life. If the soul is a fire, as we showed, it ought to ascend toward heaven; as a fire, that is, it should tend toward immortality which is in heaven, lest it be extinguished. And as fire cannot burn and live unless it is contained by some rich material in which it has its nourishment, so the matter and food of the soul is justice alone which is held for life.

After this, God placed man, begotten in the manner I have described, in Paradise, that is, in the most fertile and most pleasant garden, which He planted in all parts with every kind of wood and tree in the orient, so that from their various fruits he might be nourished, and that free from all labors he might serve God the Father with the highest devotion. Then He gave him certain commands; if he observed these, he would remain immortal; and if he transgressed them, he would be punished with death. This was a precept; that of one tree which was in the midst of Paradise he should not eat. On that tree He had placed knowledge of good and evil. Then

⁵ *Catiline* 1.2.

that evil one, envying the works of God, applied all his fallacies and clever deceits for the downfall of man that he might rob him of immortality. First, he enticed the woman with his trickery to eat the forbidden food, and through her he persuaded the man himself also to transgress the law of God. Then, when the knowledge of good and evil was experienced, man began to be ashamed of his nudity and he hid himself from the face of God, something which he was not in the habit of doing before. Then God passed sentence upon the sinners and drove man out of Paradise so that he would have to gain his living by his own labor. He surrounded Paradise itself with a wall of fire, so that man could not approach until God holds upon the earth the final judgment and calls back to the same place the just, those who worship Him, when death has been taken away.⁶ Just so the sacred books teach, and also the Erythraean Sibyl when she says:

Those who honor God will inherit real and everlasting life; these for all time will dwell together in Paradise, the all-abounding garden.⁷

But since these matters are the 'last things,' we will treat of them in the last part of this work.

Now let us explain those things which are 'firsts.' Death, therefore, followed man according to the decree of God. This even the Sibyl in her song teaches, saying:

Man, formed by the holy skill of God, whom the serpent deceived by his guile, took up death for himself beyond what was fated and chose knowledge of good and evil.⁸

Thus, the life of man was made a temporary thing, but long, for it lasted for a thousand years. Although Varro was not unaware of the fact that this was given out in the divine writings and published through the knowledge of all, he was inclined to argue 'why the ancients were thought to have lived a thousand years.' 'For,' he said, 'among the Egyptians, months

⁶ Cf. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 103A.

⁷ Frg. 2.46ff.

⁸ Frg. 8.260ff.

were counted in place of years, so that not the turning of the sun through the twelve signs makes a year, but the moon which passes over that sign-bearing cycle in the space of thirty days.⁹ This argument is clearly false; for no one then passed the thousandth year, but now, those who reach the hundredth, which happens quite often, certainly live 1,200 months. And certain authors relate that 'some were accustomed to attain to the age of 120 years.' But because Varro did not know why or when the life of man was shortened, he himself shortened it, although he knew that a man could live 1,400 months.

Chapter 13

Now when God saw afterwards that the world was filled with evil and crimes, He determined to destroy the human race by a flood. However, He chose one man for the reparation of the multitude, because in the face of the corruption of all he remained a singular example of justice. When he was six hundred years old, this man built an ark, just as God had commissioned him, and in it, he himself, with his wife and three sons together with their wives were saved when the waters had covered all the highest mountains. Then, when the earth had dried, God cursed the injustice of the previous generations, and lest the length of life should again be a cause of the fashioning of evils, He lessened the age of man a little with each succeeding progeny, and placed the term or measure at one hundred and twenty years, a limit which is not permitted to be passed.

When that man had left the ark, as the holy books teach, he worked the earth zealously and planted the vine with his hands. Whence they are refuted who think that Liber is the author of wine, for he preceded not only Liber but even Saturn and Uranus by many ages. When he had taken the

⁹ Lactantius states that his source here is Varro, but it has not been identified more precisely.

first fruit of the vine, becoming happy, he drank of it until he was drunk and lay down naked. When one of his sons, whose name was Cham, saw this, he did not cover his father's nudity but went out and even made it known to his brothers. But they, taking a cloth, entered, and turning away their eyes, covered their father. When the father learned what had been done, he cursed his son and sent him away. That one, exiled, settled in a part of that land which is now called Arabia, and the land was called Chanaan from his name and his descendants were called Chanaanites.

This was the first people which did not know God because its leader and founder did not receive the worship of God from his father when he was cursed by him, and so he bequeathed an ignorance of the divinity to his posterity. From this nation all the nearby peoples spread with increasing multitude. The descendants of the father of this one himself were called Hebrews, among whom the religion of God resided. But from these too, afterwards, when their number had increased immeasurably, and since the narrow confines of their territory could not hold them, young people (either sent by their parents or of their own accord when poverty compelled) scattered as wanderers here and there to seek new abodes for themselves. They filled up all the islands and the whole earth, and torn from the stock of a holy root, they established for themselves new customs and institutions arbitrarily. But of all of them, those who had occupied Egypt began to look up to the heavenly bodies and adore them. And because they were not covered with dwelling places, because of the type of climate, and because the sky is not hidden by any clouds in that region, they noted the courses and effects of the stars, often venerating them rather curiously and willingly while they beheld them. Later, led on by certain prodigies, they devised monstrous representations of animals, and we will soon¹ disclose the authors of these. Others, though, who had been dispersed throughout the land, while they marveled at the ele-

¹ Cf. ch. 16.

ments of the universe, gave veneration to the heavens, sun, earth, and sea without any images and temples, and celebrated sacrifices to them in the open; until as the times passed along, they made temples and shrines for very powerful kings and began to worship them with victims and incenses. Thus, the peoples began to wander astray from the knowledge of God. They are in error, therefore, who contend that there have been cults of the gods from the beginning of things, and that there was an earlier type of religion than that of the one God which they think was discovered later in time; in error because they are ignorant of the font and origin of truth. Now let us return to the beginning of the world.

Chapter 14

When, therefore, the number of men had begun to increase, God, seeing to it that the devil, to whom from the beginning He had given power over the earth, should not corrupt or destroy men by his deceits (as he had done in the beginning), sent messengers for the protection and care of the human race.¹ He charged these before all things else not to lose the dignity of their celestial substance through contagion with the stain of earth. Plainly He prohibited them from doing that which He knew they would do, from which they could not hope for pardon. So, while they were dwelling with men, that most astute master of the earth coaxed them little by little according to the same custom to vices, and he stained them by contacts with women. Then, not being received into heaven because of the sins in which they had immersed themselves, they fell to the earth. Thus, the devil made them from angels of God into his satellites and ministers. Those who were sprung from these, because they were neither angels nor men, but having a certain middle nature, were not received into the

¹ In connection with this and the following chapter, cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* Chs. 26,27.

lower world as their parents were not received into heaven. Thus, there were made two classes of spirits, one heavenly, the other earthly. The latter are the unclean spirits, the authors of the evils which are done, and of these the same devil is the chief. From this Trismegistus² calls him the *daemoniarch*.

The grammarians³ say that these were called spirits, like indwelling powers (*daēmonas*),⁴ that is, skilled and knowing of things; for they think that these are gods. They do, indeed, know many future events, but not all, for it is not permitted to them to know the hidden plan of God, and, therefore, they are accustomed to arrange their responses into ambiguous terms. The poets also know them to be *daēmonas* and speak of them as such. Thus Hesiod says: 'These are the spirits of great Zeus, through counsels good, living on earth, and the guardians of living men.'⁵ This was written because God had sent those guardians to the human race. But these very ones, since they are pervertors of men, want themselves to seem guardians so that they might be worshiped and that God might not be worshiped. The philosophers also discuss these matters.⁶ For Plato even in *The Symposium*⁷ tried to explain their natures, and Socrates said that there was a deity (*daimon*) residing within him, who had been with him since he was a child and by whose control and will his life was directed. All the art of the Magi and their power also rests in the aspirations of these, and when men's powers of sight have been invoked by them, they are deceived so that they do not see the things which are, but think that they see those things which are not. These spirits, contaminated and lost, as I say, wander over all

² Source unknown.

³ Cf. e.g., Plato, *Cratylus* 398B.

⁴ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.15. In Homer a *daimon* was equivalent to a god. By Plato's time the term meant the strange, incomprehensible, and divine power, the 'presence' or tutelary nature of a deity.

⁵ *Works and Days* 122f.

⁶ Cf. Minucius Felix, 26.9; 12.

⁷ Cf. 202 Ef.

the earth, and they work toward a solace of their own perdition by destroying men.

Thus, they fill all things with trickeries, frauds, deceits, and errors. They cling to individual men and they seize all homes, indeed, every last doorway. They take to themselves the name of *genii*,⁸ for thus they translate the word *daēmonas* into Latin. Men honor them in their inner chambers, and daily for them do they pour out wines. Knowing these demons, they venerate them as though they were terrestrial gods and dispellers of the evils which they themselves make and bring upon them. Since these spirits are light and incomprehensible, they insinuate themselves into the bodies of men, and secretly working upon the inner organs, they vitiate the health, incite sicknesses, terrify the thoughts by dreams, and disturb the minds with madness, so they might force men through these evils to run for their help.

Chapter 15

The scheme or plan of all these fallacies is obscure to those devoid of truth; for they think that those spirits, who can do nothing other than harm, are of advantage when they cease to harm. Someone may say perhaps that they ought to be honored for this, that they may not harm, if, indeed, they are able to harm. They harm, indeed, but they harm those by whom they are feared, whom the powerful and high hand of God does not protect, and who are not initiated by the pledge of truth. They fear the just, that is, those who worship God; and adjured by His name, they depart from their bodies. And at their words, as if beaten by rods, they not only confess that they are demons, but they also give out their names, those which are adored in the temples. Generally, they do this in

⁸ The *genius* was the personal residing deity for each man according to ancient Roman religious thought as the *Juno* was for each woman.

the presence of their worshipers, not, to be sure, for the opprobrium of religion, but for their honor, because neither to God by whom they are adjured, nor to the just by whose voice they are tortured are they able to lie. So often with mighty wailings do they proclaim that they are beaten and that they burn and that they are already going out: the knowledge of God and the justice of His power has so much hold over them. Whom, then, can they harm if not those whom they have in their power?

In fine, Hermes affirms that those who know God are not only safe from attacks of the demons, but also they are not even held by fate. 'Piety,' he said, 'is the one guardian. For a reverent man neither the evil demon nor fate controls. God rescues the reverent one from all evil. For the one and only good among men is piety.'¹ What this piety or reverence is, he shows in another place in these words: 'Reverence is the knowledge of God.'² Asclepius, his hearer, also expressed the same opinion more fully in that perfect speech which he wrote to the King.³ Each of them in truth affirms that demons are enemies and annoyers of men. Trismegistus calls them 'harming angels.'⁴ Therefore, he was not unaware that from celestial beings they had begun to be depraved earthly ones.

Chapter 16

Through demons have been discovered astrology, divination, the practice of augury, and those very practices which are called oracle-giving, necromancy, magic, and whatever other evils that men practice either openly or secretly. All these are false of themselves as the Erythraean Sibyl testifies:

¹ Cf. Cyrillus, *Contra Iulianum* IV.6.130E (cf. Patricius, p. 51a f.).

² *Ibid.*

³ Cf. Pseudo-Apuleius, *Asclepius*, c.25.

⁴ *angelous ponērous (nocentes angeli)*.

'Because all these things are deceiving, just as foolish men are finding out this day.'¹

Yet those same authors themselves work on their own presences, in order that they may be believed to be true; thus they delude the credulity of men through a feigned or lying divinity because it is not profitable to disclose the truth to them. These are they who taught how to feign images and appearances, who in order to turn men's minds away from the worship of the true God, fashioned likenesses of dead kings and adorned them with exquisite beauty and then caused them to be set up and consecrated, and they put their names upon themselves as though they put on other personalities.

But the Magi and those whom the people actually call evil-doers, since they ply their execrable arts, summon those celestial ones which are read of in the holy books by their own real names.² These outright incestuous and horrid spirits, in order to confuse all things and overwhelm human hearts with errors, sow and mix the false with the true. For they themselves have pretended that there are many celestial beings, and that there is one king of all, Jupiter, seeing that there are many spirits of angels in heaven and one God is Master and Father of all. But they have taken away the truth from the eyes of men because they wrapped it in deceptive names.

For God, just as I explained in the beginning,³ does not need a name, since He is the only One, nor do the angels, because they are immortal, either allow themselves to be called gods or wish to be. Their one and only duty is to serve the wishes of God and to do nothing but what He orders. Thus we say that the world is ruled by God as a province is by a governor. No one says that his assistants are his equals or colleagues in ruling the province, although the business is performed by their ministry. Still, these are able to do things besides the commands of the governor, because of his ignor-

¹ Fig. 3.228.

² Cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.9; Isidore, *Origines* 8.9.9.

³ Bk. I, ch. 6.

ance which is a condition of being human. That Ruler and Governor of the Universe, however, who knows all things and from whose divine eyes nothing is shielded, alone has the power over all things, and there is not anything in the angels except the necessity of obeying. So they wish no honor to be attributed to themselves whose whole honor is in God. But those who swerved from the ministry of God, because they are enemies of the truth and prevaricators of God, try to vindicate their name and take unto themselves the worship of gods, not because they desire any honor—for what is honor to the lost?—nor because they might do harm to God who cannot be harmed, but that they might harm men, whom they strive to turn away from the worship and knowledge of the true majesty lest they be able to gain immortality which they themselves have lost through their malice.

Thus, they spread darkness and cover the truth with a cloud of smoke, so that men may not know the Lord, may not know their Father. In order that they might easily ensnare people, they hide themselves in temples, are present at all the sacrifices, and often give forth prodigies. Startled by these, men apply the faith due to divinity and divine power to images. Thence it is that a stone was incised by a novice-augur; that Juno Veiens responded that she wished to migrate to Rome; that Fortuna Muliebris reported danger; that a ship followed the hand of Claudia; that Juno Nudata, and Locrensian Proserpina, and Milesian Ceres performed vindications against sacrileges; and Hercules made vindication concerning Appius, and Jupiter of Atinius, and Minerva of Caesar; and hence it is that the serpent when summoned from Epidaurus liberated Rome from pestilence,⁴ for to that place the demoniarch himself was brought in his own form without any dissimulation, since the legates sent for that purpose carried with them a dragon of wondrous magnitude.

By means of oracles, however, they deceive especially, for the

4 For these references refer to ch. 7. Also cf. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10.16; Valerius Maximus 1.8.2.

uninitiated are unable to distinguish their deviations from and meddlings with the truth, and they think that empires and victories and wealth and prosperous outcomes are granted by them. In fact, they think that the state has been freed from imminent perils by their will, perils which they announced in their responses and averted because they were placated with sacrifices. But all those things are fallacies. For where they presage the dispositions of God, to be sure, those who were His ministers interpose themselves in these matters, so that whatever things were done by God or are being done by Him, they themselves seem especially to do them or to have done them. And whenever to some people or a particular city there is something good impending, according to the determination of God, they promise that they will do it either by prodigies or dreams or oracles, provided that temples or honors or sacrifices be granted to them. After these honors have been paid, when that happens which is a necessity, they acquire for themselves supreme veneration. Hence, temples are vowed and new images consecrated and flocks of beasts are sacrificed. And when these things are done, still nonetheless is the life and salvation of those who have done them immolated.

Whenever dangers are impending, they declare that they are angered for some foolish and light cause, as Juno was with Varro because he had placed a beautiful child in the chariot of Jupiter which was for holding the equipment. It was for this reason that this Roman name was almost destroyed at Cannae!⁵ But if Juno feared another Ganymede,⁶ why did a Roman youth have to pay the penalty? Or if the gods only care for the leaders and neglect the other multitude, why did Varro alone escape, and why was Paulus, who deserved nothing, slain? Certainly, then, nothing befell the Roman 'by the doom

⁵ Cf. Valerius Maximus, 1.1.16.

⁶ Ganymede, a son of Tros, carried off by the gods to be a cup-bearer of Zeus. This also was a cause of Juno's proverbial hatred of the Trojan race.

of cruel Juno,⁷ since Hannibal wiped out the two armies of the Roman people by his own cleverness and valor. Juno could not dare either to defend Carthage 'where her arms and chariot were'⁸ or to harm the Romans, because 'she had heard that a race was springing from Trojan blood which would one day overturn her citadels.'⁹

These are the mockeries or games of those who, lurking under the names of the dead, hold out wounds for the living. Thus, if that danger which threatens can be avoided, they want to seem to have averted it because they were placated; or, if it cannot be avoided, they do it so that it may seem to have happened because of some contempt shown to them. With this guile and these arts they tear away the knowledge of the one true God in all peoples. Destroyed by their own vices, they rage and go about that they may destroy. For this reason also they have contrived human victims, themselves enemies of the human race,¹⁰ so that they may devour as many souls as possible!

Chapter 17

Someone will say: 'Why then does God allow this to happen, and why does He not relieve such evil errors?' I answer, in order that evils may struggle with the good, in order that vices may be opposed by virtues, and in order that He may have some whom He may punish and some whom He may reward; for He has determined at the end of time to pass judgment on the living and the dead. (Of this judgment I will have a discussion in the last book of this present work.)¹ He defers it, however, until the end of time, when He will pour forth His wrath in power and heavenly might, just as 'The pre-

⁷ Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.292.

⁸ *Ibid.* 1.16.

⁹ *Ibid.* 1.19,20.

¹⁰ The word play is lost in English; victim and enemy are not related as in Latin—*hostia* and *hostis*.

¹ Cf. Bk. 7, ch. 20.

dictions of the holy seers with their terrible warnings cause dread.² Now, though, He allows men to wander and to act impiously against Him, while He Himself is just and mild and patient. Nor is it possible that patience should not be perfect in Him in whom is perfect virtue; whence certain ones think that God is not even angered at all, because He is not subject to the emotions which are disturbances of the soul, and since every creature which is affected and moved (by these emotions) is weak. This kind of thinking does away with truth and religion completely. Meanwhile, let us put aside this topic on the wrath of God, because it is a very rich and full subject which should be handled more fully in a work solely devoted to the subject.³ Now whoever has venerated and followed those most evil spirits will obtain possession of neither the heaven nor the light which are of God, but he will fall into those regions which in the distribution of things we showed⁴ were assigned to the prince of evil, namely, into darkness and hell and everlasting punishment.

I have explained that the religions of the false gods are vain in a triple manner. Firstly, because those images which are worshiped are representations of dead men, it is verily a perversion and an incongruity that the likeness of a man be worshiped by a likeness of God, for then he worships what is lower and weaker; then it is an inexpiable crime to desert the living that you might serve memorials of the dead, who can give neither life nor light which they themselves lack to anyone; nor is there any other God but the one to whose judgment and power every living creature is subject. In the second place, they are vain because those very sacred images which utterly foolish men serve are without all sense, since they are but earth. Who does not understand that it is wrong for an upright animal to be bent over to adore the earth? It is for this reason that the earth is under our feet, that it might be

² Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.464.

³ Cf. Lactantius' complete work on this topic—*The Wrath of God*.

⁴ Cf. chs. 9, 11.

trodden on, not adored by us who have been lifted up from it and who have received a lofty bearing beyond all other living creatures. It is not that we should grovel beneath, nor that we should turn this heavenly countenance of ours to the earth, but rather that we should direct our eyes where their natural condition has directed them, that we should adore nothing and worship nothing except the unique Name of our only Maker and Father, who for this reason formed man in an upright position that we might know that we are called to the supernal heavenly regions. Thirdly, they are vain because the spirits which are in charge of those religions, condemned and cast out by God, are tossed about over the earth. These are not only able to provide nothing for their worshipers (since power over things resides with One), but, moreover, they also destroy them with deadly enticements and errors. And this is their daily work, to overwhelm men with darkness so that the true God be not sought by them. Those spirits, therefore, should not be honored, since they lie under the sentence of God. It is a very great means of expiation to abandon oneself to the power of those over whom, if you follow justice, you can be more powerful and to expel them and put them to flight by calling upon the divine name. But if it is clear that those religions are vain and false in so many ways by which I have explained why, then it is manifest that those who supplicate the dead or venerate the earth or who sell their souls to impure spirits do not hold fast to the reason of men, and that those who, rebelling against God, the Father of the human race, have violated all justice by entering upon in-expiable sacred rites or sacrileges, will pay the penalty of their impiety and crime.

Chapter 18

Whoever, therefore, strives to regard the guaranty of man and to hold to the reason and plan of his nature, let him

raise himself from the ground and with upright mind direct his eyes toward heaven. Let him not seek God under his feet nor take from his footsteps that which he may adore, for it must needs be that whatever lies beneath man is subject to man, but rather let him seek Him alone; let him seek in the heights, because nothing can be greater than man except what is above man. God is greater than man; therefore, He is above, not below, and He must not be sought in the lowest regions, but rather in the highest. Wherefore there is no doubt that there is no religion wherever there is a statue or image. For if religion consists of divine things, and if there is nothing divine except in things that are heavenly, images lack religion, since there can be nothing heavenly in that which is made of earth.

This can be clear, indeed, to a wise man from the very name of the image (*simulacrum*). Whatever is simulated is necessarily false; nor can it ever receive the name of something true because it cheats or deceives the truth by disguise and imitation. Now if every imitation is not especially a serious matter, but a game and sport, as it were, there is no religion in the images but a mockery of religion. Therefore, truth must be preferred to all false things; earthly things must be trodden underfoot that we may attain to heavenly ones. Thus the matter stands, that whoever has prostrated his soul (whose origin is from heaven) before infernal and low things, he himself falls where he has cast himself; yet, it is necessary for man, mindful of his purpose and plan and status, to always strive and tend toward nothing except the higher things. He who has done this is surely wise, is just, is a man, and, finally, he will be judged worthy of heaven, a man whom his Father will recognize as not base and lowly, not abject upon the earth in the manner of the beasts, but rather standing and upright as He made him.

Chapter 19

Unless I am mistaken, a great and difficult portion of the task that was undertaken is now finished and with the opportunity of speaking being granted us through the promptings of His heavenly Majesty, we have expelled some inveterate errors. Now truly a far greater and more difficult struggle, this time with the philosophers, faces us, and their excellent teaching and eloquence looms before me as if it were some great mass. As I was beset formerly with the multitude and consensus of nearly all nations, now I am faced with the influence of men who are outstanding and hold every kind of honor. Who does not know that it is of more importance to deal with a few learned men than with the many who are unskilled? But it ought not to be despaired of that those also can be drawn from their opinion by God and the truth and leaders, and I do not think that they will be so stubborn that they will deny that they see the very brilliant sun with clear and open eyes. Provided that only be true which they are wont to profess, that they are held by the desire of investigating the truth, I will surely bring it about that they will believe that the truth long sought after has been found, and that they will acknowledge that it could not have been found through human skill.

BOOK THREE

ON FALSE PHILOSOPHY

Chapter 1



SINCE TRUTH IS THOUGHT to be still lying in obscurity, either through the error and inexperience of the common people in subservience to varied and foolish superstitions, or through the philosophers who are distorting it rather than making it clear by the depravity of their abilities (although Marcus Tullius was not such, for his was outstanding and admirable), I would wish that some power very close to eloquence were mine. Then, as much as the truth is strong by its own proper strength, it might somehow function just so much, relying on the strength of genius also, and bring most clear light to the human race by discussing and overcoming those public errors, as it were, of those who are regarded as wise. I wish this could be for two reasons: either for the reason that men would be able to believe more in adorned truth who, captivated by the ornamentation of speech and the charm of words, even believe lies, or that the philosophers themselves might be most powerfully attacked by us with their own arms, in which they are wont to take pleasure and to trust. But since God has wished this to be the nature of the case, namely, that simple and bare truth should be more gleaming because it is ornamented enough of itself and would, therefore, be spoiled and corrupted by adornments added extrinsically, but that lying should be pleasing only under a false guise, since corrupt of itself it

vanishes and disintegrates unless it be smeared about and polished with some attractive ornament, I accept with a calm mind that mediocre ability which has been granted to me. With confidence then, not in eloquence, but in truth, I undertook this work, a greater work perhaps than is possible to be sustained by my powers. Even though I should fail, the truth itself, with the help of God whose work this is, will complete it.

For since I know that some of the greatest orators have often been defeated by mediocre pleaders, because so great is the power of the truth that it defends itself with its own brilliance, although in slight matters, why should I think that in this, the greatest cause, it will be oppressed by those ingenious and skilled men, to be sure, who, however, speak falsehoods? And why should I not think that, even if not from my oratory which flows still weakly from a scant spring, the truth will appear as clear and brilliant by its own light? If the philosophers did not stand out as marvelous in the teaching of literature, I would yield to them (even) the knowledge and science of truth which no one can attain by thinking and disputing. Neither do I reprehend now the zeal of those who wished to know the truth, because God made the nature of man most desirous of attaining the truth. But this I maintain and this I charge: that the effect has not followed their honest and noble desire, since they knew neither what the truth itself was, nor how or where or with what mind it was to be sought. Thus, while they desired to aid human errors, they rather plunged themselves into the greatest holes and errors.

To this task, therefore, of refuting philosophy, the very order of the matter undertaken has led me. For when every error arises, either from a false religion or from philosophy, it is necessary to overturn both in conquering it. Since it has been given to us in the divine writings that the thoughts of the philosophers are foolish, it must be taught by the matter and by arguments, lest anyone influenced by the honorable name of wisdom and deceived by the splendor of empty

eloquence prefer to believe human things rather than divine. Indeed, these divine writings have been given to us briefly and without any covering. Nor was it fitting that when God spoke to man, He should apply His words to argument, as though faith could not be put in Him otherwise, but it was fitting that He spoke as the mighty Judge of all things to whom it belongs not to plead but to pronounce. That is for Him as God. But when we apply the testimony of the divine word to single matters, surely we will show by how much more certain arguments the truths can be defended, as even false things are so defended, so that the truth may be seen. Wherefore, it is not that we have so much regard for the philosophers, but that we have reverence for their eloquence. They were able to speak well as erudite men, but they were in no way able to speak truly, since they had not learned truth from Him who is its source. Nor shall we accomplish anything great at all because we charge them of an ignorance which they themselves acknowledge most wisely. Since in that ignorance alone credence is not given to these in which alone it ought to be given, I shall attempt to show that never were they such speakers of truth as when they pronounced opinions about their own ignorance.

Chapter 2

Now, since in the two previous books the falsity of the religions has been demonstrated and also the very origin of all error has been exposed, it is the duty of this book to show how empty and false philosophy is also, that when all error has been removed, the truth may shine forth revealed. Let us begin, therefore, from the common name of philosophy, so that when the head itself is destroyed, an easier way may lie open to us for tearing apart the whole body, if that may be called a body whose parts and members are so disunited and

do not cohere in any alliance among themselves, but as though scattered and dissipated, seem rather to palpitate than to live.

Philosophy is, as the name indicates and as they themselves define it, a study of wisdom. Whence, therefore, should I prove philosophy not to be the wisdom which is of the signification of its very name? He who is eager for wisdom is surely not yet wise, but he is eager that he may be able to be wise. In the other arts the study is apparently what it effects and whither it tends. When by learning one has attained these, he is not now called the student or the one eager for the craft, but the craftsman. But for modesty's sake in philosophy, they called themselves students of wisdom, not wise men. In fact, Pythagoras, who first came upon this name when he was a little wiser than those before him who thought themselves wise, knew that it was possible by no human study to arrive at wisdom, and, therefore, that it was not fitting for a perfect name to be put upon an incomprehended and imperfect thing. And so when it was asked of him what he would declare himself, he answered: 'A philosopher,' that is, a seeker of wisdom.

If, then, philosophy seeks wisdom, and is not itself wisdom, for it is necessary that it be other than what it seeks and other than what is sought, neither is the seeking itself right, because it is not possible to find anything. Therefore, I would concede that the philosophers are not even students of wisdom, because wisdom is not arrived at by that study. For if the chance of coming upon truth were subject to this study, if this study were the path to wisdom, as it were, then it would be found at some time. But since it has not been comprehended, although in so many periods of time so many geniuses have been spent on its search, it is clear that there is no wisdom there. Those who philosophize, therefore, do not pursue or study wisdom, but think that they study it, because that which they seek they do not know where or what it may be. Therefore, whether they study wisdom or whether they do not study it, they are not wise, because never can there be

found that which is either sought not rightly or not sought at all. However, let us see this—whether it is possible by this study for something or for nothing to be discovered.

Chapter 3

Philosophy seems to consist of two things: knowledge and thought, and in no other.¹ Knowledge cannot come from ingeniousness, nor can it be grasped by cogitation, because it is not of man to have in himself proper knowledge, but it is of God.² A mortal nature does not have knowledge except that knowledge which comes from without. For this reason the divine wisdom placed the eyes and ears and other sense organs plainly in the body, so that through those entrances knowledge might come to the mind. To seek the causes of natural things, to wish to know whether the sun is as great as it seems or whether it is many times greater than this whole earth; whether the moon is globular or concave, and whether the stars adhere in the sky or are carried about through the air in a free course; of the sky itself—of what magnitude and of what material it is, whether it is quiet and immobile or whether it revolves with incredible speed; how great is the thickness of the earth or on what fundamentals it is poised and suspended, to wish to comprehend these things by disputation and conjecture is, I say, surely such a feat that it is like discussing what sort of city we would think a city of the most remote people to be, one which we have never seen and of which we have heard nothing other than the name. If we judge that for us there is a knowledge in that matter that cannot be known, do we not seem to be mad who dare to affirm that in which we can be vanquished? How much more should those be judged wild and demented who think that they know the natural things which cannot be known by man! Rightly,

¹ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 2.24.1.

² For similar treatment of the material of this section, cf. Arnobius 2.51.

therefore, did Socrates and the Academicians following him extol knowledge, which is the mark not of one discussing and disputing but of one divining.

It remains that speculation alone is in philosophy: for whereas knowledge is absent, speculation possesses it totally. Each one speculates on that which he does not know.³ Those, moreover, who discuss natural phenomena speculate that things are as they discourse. Therefore, they do not know the truth, since truth is knowledge of something certain; their speculation is of an uncertainty.⁴ Let us return to that example above. Come, let us speculate about the status and quality of that city which is unknown to us in all things except its name. It is very likely situated on level ground, with stone walls, high buildings, many streets, and magnificently ornamented shrines. Let us describe if you wish, the customs and dress of the citizens. But when we have said these things, another will speak contrary opinions, and when this one has concluded, a third will rise, and then others, and they will put forth opinions very different from the one which we held. Which, therefore, of all the opinions will be the most true? Perhaps none. 'But all things which fall into the nature of things have been said, so that something of them must be true.'⁵ Still it will not be known who has said the true something. It is possible that all have erred in some part and in some part attained the truth. We would be fools, then, if we should seek this by disputation. Someone may arise who may deride our opinions and hold us as insane men who wish to speculate on that of which we do not know what sort of thing it is. But there is no need to seek for things placed at a distance, whereby no one may come perhaps to refute us. Let us now speculate on what is being done here and now in the market place or in the government chamber. That also is far. Let us speak of what is being done where there is only one

³ Cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 4.11.26.

⁴ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 2.24.2.

⁵ The source of this statement is not given, yet it is treated as a quotation by the editors.

wall placed between us: yet no one can know that except one who hears or sees it. Therefore, no one dares to say it, because immediately he will be refuted not by words but by the very thing itself present. Nevertheless, the philosophers do this same thing who discuss about what is going on in the heavens, and they think that they do this with impunity because no one arises who will make charges against their errors. If they thought that someone would advance to show that they are raging and lying, they would never discuss any one of those things which they are not able to know. Their impudence and audacity should not be considered the more fortunate, therefore, because they are not convicted. God has convicted them, to whom alone is the truth known, and though He seems to pass on it, He reckons that wisdom of men as supreme foolishness.⁶

Chapter 4

Rightly then did Zeno and the Stoics repudiate speculation. For to speculate that you know what you do not know is not the mark of a wise man, but rather of a rash and foolish one. If, then, it is not possible for anything to be known, as Socrates taught, and if speculation is not fitting either, as Zeno held, then all philosophy is taken away. What of the fact that it is overturned, not only by these two who were princes of philosophy, but by all, so that now it seems already to have been exhausted by its own arms? Philosophy has been divided into many sects and all hold varied beliefs. In which do we place the truth? Certainly, it is not possible to place it in all. Let us designate in which we will; then, surely, wisdom will not be in all the others. Let us pass over to the individual points. In the same way, whatever we will give to one we will take away from the others. Each single sect overturns all the others, so that it may confirm itself and its principles, nor

⁶ Cf. 1 Cor. 3.19. 'For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.'

does it grant that any other may be wise lest it confess itself to be unwise. But just as it lifts up others, it is itself also lifted up by all the others. Nevertheless, the philosophers are those who accuse it of foolishness. Whatever you might praise and call true is vituperated by the philosophers as false. Therefore, shall we believe the one praising himself and his own doctrine or the many who are blaming the ignorance of that other one? It must be that what many think is more right than what one thinks. For no one is able to judge rightly about himself, as the noble poet testifies: 'The nature of all men is so arranged that they see and judge what concerns others better than what concerns themselves.'¹

Therefore, since all things are uncertain, men ought to trust either everybody or nobody. If nobody, then they are not wise, since individuals think that they are wise; if everybody, then equally they are not wise, since the individuals are denied by all to be wise. All, therefore, perish all together in this manner, and they thus throttle one another just as those Spartans of the poets, so that not one of all remains. It happens for this reason: since they have a sword, they do not have a shield.

If, then, the individual sects are convicted of foolishness by the judgment of many sects, all are, therefore, found to be vain and empty; thus philosophy itself consumes and exhausts itself. When Arcesilas, the founder of the Academy, learned this, he collected the reprehensions of all among themselves and the confession of ignorance of the famous philosophers, and armed himself against them all. Thus he set up a new philosophy of not philosophizing. So, under his authorship, there began to be two kinds of philosophy: the one, that old kind which ascribes wisdom to itself; the other, a new kind, repugnant to wisdom because it draws away. In these two kinds I see conflict and, as it were, a civil war. In what place shall we put wisdom which cannot be drawn apart? If the nature of things can be known, this crowd of recruits will

¹ Terence, *Self-Tormenter* 3.1.94ff.

perish; if it cannot be known, the old ones will be done away with; if they should be equal, nevertheless the leader of all, philosophy, will perish because it is distracted, for nothing can be contrary to itself without destruction. But if, as I have shown, there can be no internal and proper knowledge in man on account of the frailty of human condition, the side of Arcesilas conquers. But not even that will stand, because it is not possible that absolutely nothing be known.

Chapter 5

There are many things which nature itself, constant use, and the necessity of life force us to know. And so you must perish, unless you know what things are useful for life that you might seek them, and what things are dangerous that you might escape and avoid them. Besides, there are many things which experience has discovered. The various courses of the sun and moon and the movements of the stars and the plan of the seasons have been grasped, and the nature of bodies and the powers of herbs have been acquired by doctors, and by farmers the nature of the lands and the signs also of future storms and weather have been gathered. In short, there is no art which does not stand upon knowledge. Arcesilas, therefore, if he were wise about anything, ought to have distinguished what things can be known from what things cannot. But if he had done this, he would have reduced himself to the level of the people. For the crowd is sometimes more wise, because it is wise only so far as it is necessary to be wise. If you ask the common people whether they know something or nothing, they will say that they know what they know, and they will admit ignorance of what they do not know. Rightly, then, did he remove the disciplines of the others, but he did not rightly establish his own. Ignorance of all things cannot be wisdom, the very property of which is to

know. When, therefore, he expugned the philosophers and taught that they knew nothing, he himself also lost the name of philosopher, because his teaching is that nothing is known. He who reprehends others because they do not know ought to be a knowing one himself, but, when he knows nothing, what perversity is it or what insolence to establish himself as a philosopher for the very reason for which he takes away the others from the field? They are able to respond in this wise: 'If you prove that we know nothing, and are, therefore, not wise because we know nothing, then not even you are wise, because you admit that you too know nothing.' What, therefore, did Arcesilas promote, except that when all philosophers had been wiped out, he pierced himself with the same sword?

Chapter 6

Is there wisdom nowhere then? It was, in fact, among those very men, but no one saw it. Some thought that all things could be known; these surely were not wise. Others thought that nothing could be known; nor were these wise either. The former attributed too much to man, the latter too little; to both and in each part measure was lacking. Where, therefore, is wisdom? That you may not think that you know all things, which is characteristic of God, nor that you do not know all things, which is characteristic of the beasts. There is a middle state which belongs to man, that is, a knowledge joined with and tempered by ignorance. Since knowledge in us is from the soul, which arises from heaven; ignorance is of the body which is from the earth, whence there is in us some sharing both with God and with the animals. Thus, since we consist of these two elements, one of which is endowed with light, the other with darkness, a part of knowledge is given to us and a part of ignorance. It is permitted to pass over this bridge, as it were, without the danger of falling; for all those

who have inclined themselves to one or the other side, either to the right or the left, have fallen.

I will tell how each group has erred in some way. The Academicians have argued against the physicists from obscure matters that there is no knowledge, and, content with examples of a few incomprehensible things, they have embraced ignorance, as though they had removed all knowledge because they had removed it in part. The physicists, on the contrary, drew their argument from those things which are plain and evident that all things could be known, and, content with perspicuous examples, they held on to knowledge as though they had defended it in entirety because they had defended it in part. So the one group did not see the clear things and the other did not see the obscure things, but while both sides with concerted strength either retained or broke away from knowledge alone, they did not see that it would be set up in a middle position which would transmit them to wisdom. But when Arcesilas, the master of ignorance, charged Zeno, the prince of Stoics, with overturning all of philosophy, he took up this opinion under the authority of Socrates, namely, that he affirmed that nothing could be known. And thus he argued against the belief of philosophers who had thought that by their ability the truth had been probed and discovered. For inasmuch as that wisdom had been mortal, and had been instituted just a few generations before, it had come to its greatest increase, so that now of necessity it was growing old and perishing; suddenly the Academy now has appeared, just as though it were the old age of philosophy, to complete it in its deflorescent stage, and Arcesilas rightly saw that those ascribing to this belief were rather fools to think that the knowledge of the truth could be comprehended by conjecture. But it is not possible except for one who has known beforehand what is true to convince one speaking false things. Arcesilas, not knowing the truth, and attempting to do this, introduced an a-systatic kind of philosophy which we can call in our language unstable or inconstant. For in order that

nothing should be known, it is necessary that something be known; for if you know nothing at all, that itself, that nothing can be known, will be removed. Thus, he who pronounces as if in the place of a sentence that nothing is known, he will profess it as perceived and known; therefore, something can be known. Similar to this is that which is accustomed to be proposed in the schools as an example of an a-systatic kind, for a certain one to have dreamed lest he believe in dreams. For if he has believed, then it will follow that it ought not to be believed, but if he has not believed, then it will follow that it should be believed. Thus, if nothing can be known, it is necessary that that itself be known, namely, that nothing is known. If, however, it is known that it is not possible to be known, then that is false which is said, that nothing can be known. So there is induced a dogma which is repugnant to itself and which dissolves itself.

But a man versed in the theories of the other philosophers has wished to snatch away knowledge, that he might hide it at home—for surely he does not take that from himself who affirms something, in order to take from others, but he does nothing; and this is apparent and he betrays his theft. How much more wisely and truly he would act, if, making an exception, he would say that the causes and reasons of heavenly or natural things, because they are hidden, neither can be known, since no one may teach them, nor ought they to be sought for, since they may not be discovered by seeking. When such an exception as this had been made, he would have warned the physicists not to seek those things which exceed the measure of human thought, and he would have freed himself from the envy of calumny, and he would have given us something certain to follow. But now, since he has drawn us back from following others, so that we do not wish to know more than we can, he has drawn us back no less from himself also. For who would want to labor so as not to know anything, or who would want to undertake a doctrine of that sort so as to lose even common knowledge? If this is a doctrine,

then it is necessary that knowledge exist; if it is not, who is so foolish that he would think that ought to be learned in which either nothing is learned or it is even unlearned? Wherefore, if neither all things can be known, as the physicists thought, nor if nothing, as the Academicians, then all philosophy is extinct.

Chapter 7

Let us pass now to another division of philosophy which is termed moral, in which the plan of all of philosophy is contained, since in that physical philosophy there is merely delight, but in this utility as well. And since in disposing the condition of life and in forming customs there is greater danger of sinning, it is necessary that greater diligence be applied in order that we may know how we ought to live. In the one area (that of physical philosophy) pardon can be granted because if they say something, they are of no service; if they rage wildly, they do no harm. But in this branch there is no place for discord, no place for error. It is necessary that all think the one way and give forth the same philosophy as with one mouth, because if there should be any mistake made, all life is overturned. In that former division of philosophy, as there is less of danger, so there is more of difficulty because the obscure system and plan of things forces men to have varied and diverse thoughts. Here, as there is more of danger, so there is less of difficulty because the very use of things and daily experiences can teach what is better and more true.

Let us see, therefore, whether they (the moral philosophers) agree or what they may bring to us by which our life may be more rightly spent. It is not necessary to go over everything. Let us select one thing, a very strong one which is the chief and principal point on which the hinge of all philosophy turns.

Epicurus thinks that the highest good is in the pleasure of

the mind.¹ Aristippus holds that it is in the pleasure of the body; Callipho and Dinomachus have joined honorableness with pleasure. Diodorus put the greatest good in the privation of pain, Hieronymus in not grieving, the Peripatetics in the goods of the mind, of body, and of fortune. Knowledge was the highest good for Herillus, for Zeno, to live according to nature, for certain Stoics, to follow virtue. Aristotle placed it in honor and virtue. These are the opinions of almost all the philosophers.² In such diversity whom are we to follow? Whom believe? Authority is equal in all. If we can choose what is better, philosophy is no longer necessary for us because we are now the wise ones who judge about the sentences of the wise. Since, however, we come for the sake of learning wisdom, how are we able to judge, we who have not yet begun to be wise, especially since an Academician is at hand, who may draw us back with the pallium and forbid us to believe anyone, yet not bring forth himself what we may follow?

Chapter 8

What, therefore, remains except that putting aside furious and obstinate litigations we should come to the judge, namely, that giver of simple and quiet wisdom, which is able not only to form us and lead us into the way, but also to bear sentence concerning the controversies of those philosophers? This teaches us what is the true and highest good of man. Before I begin to speak about this, all of those opinions ought to be refuted so that it may be apparent that no one of those philosophers was wise.

Since the discussion is about the office of man, it is necessary that the highest good of the highest animal be constituted in that which cannot be common with the other animals.

¹ Epicurus, frg. 452.

² For these opinions, cf. Cicero, *Academics* 2.42.129,131; *Tusculans* 5.30. 84ff.

But as teeth are proper to wild beasts, horns to cattle, feathers to birds, so something of his own ought to be ascribed to man without which he would lose the reason of his own condition. For what is given for the sake of living or generating is to all; it is, indeed, a natural good; however, it is not the highest except that which is proper to each one kind. That man¹ was not wise, then, who believed that pleasure of the mind was the highest good, since whether that is security or joy it is common to all. I do not think that Aristippus should be even answered, since there is doubt in no one's mind that he was not a man who was always rushing toward the pleasures of the body and cared for nothing other than food and sex. For he lived in such a way that there was no difference between him and the beast save this one, that he spoke. But if to an ass or a sow or a dog the faculty of speaking should be given and you were to ask them what they wish for themselves when they so rabidly attack the females that they can scarcely be torn apart and even neglect food and drink, why they either violently drive away other males or do not even stop for food, but often being attacked by stronger ones they press on the more, why they fear neither storms nor cold, why they undertake labor and do not refuse danger, what else will they answer except that pleasure of the body is the highest good? It is for them to attain that pleasure, in order to be affected with the most enjoyable sensations, and they are of such worth that they think no labor nor wounds nor death itself should be avoided by them in order to pursue them. Shall we seek from these, then, the precepts of living, from men who feel the same way as the beasts who have no rational soul?

The Cyrenaics say that virtue itself ought to be praised for this, that it is productive of pleasure. 'But,' that obscene cur or that filthy sow may say,² 'I struggle indeed with an adversary with the greatest contest of strength, in order that my power may bring forth pleasure for me, of which I am

1 Cf. Epicurus, frg. 452.

2 Cf. Vergil, *Georgics* 1.470; Horace, *Epist.* 2.2.75.

necessarily deprived if I should depart conquered.' Shall we learn to be wise from these, therefore, who are separated from the beasts not by judgment but by speech?

To think that the highest good is the privation of pain is surely not characteristic of the Peripatetics or Stoics but of the clinical philosophers.³ For who would not understand that this is the point discussed by the sick and those placed in some state of pain? What is so ridiculous as to consider that which a physician can give as the highest good? We must grieve, then, seriously and often, that we enjoy a good thing in order that afterwards it may not be more pleasant to grieve. He is most wretched who has never grieved, since he lacks a good, and we thought him most fortunate because he lacked evil. He was not far from this vanity who said that the highest good was to sorrow for nothing whatsoever. For beside the fact that every animal is an escaper of pain, who can put forth this good for himself which, in order that it may come to us, we can do nothing other than wish?

The highest good cannot make anyone blessed unless it has always been in his power; this, however, not virtue supplies to man, not doctrine, not labor, but nature itself grants it to all living beings. Those who have joined pleasure with honor have wished to escape this communion, but they have effected a repugnant good, since he who is given to pleasure must be lacking in honorableness, and he who desires honor must lack pleasure. The good of the Peripatetics is too manifold, and, excepting the goods of the soul (and what these are is a matter of great contention), can be seen as common with that of the beasts. For the goods of the body, freedom from harm, freedom from pain, good health are no less necessary for the dumb animals than for man, and I am not certain that they are not more so, because man can be aided by remedies and ministrations, but the animals cannot. The same holds true in regard to those things which they call the goods of fortune: for just as there is need for wealth for man to protect life, so

³ Cf. Epicurus, frg. 419; also Cyprian, *Epist.* 69.16.

animals need prey and fodder. So by bringing on a good which may not be in the power of man they have reduced the whole man to an alien dominion.

Let us hear Zeno also, for he sometimes dreams of virtue. He says it is the highest good to live properly with nature. Therefore, we must live according to the custom of the beasts. For all things which ought to be away from man are held in these: they seek pleasures, they fear, they are deceived, they lie in ambush, they kill and are slain, and what mostly concerns our discussion, they do not know God. Why, therefore, does he teach me to live according to nature which is itself prone to the worse things and instructs unto vices with certain smooth blandishments? Or if he says that nature in man is one thing and is another in beasts because man is begotten according to virtue, there is something in this, but it will not be a definition of the highest good, however, because there is no animal which does not live according to his nature.

He who made knowledge the highest good, made it something proper to man, but men seek knowledge for the sake of something else, not for itself. For who is content just to know and not seek some fruit of knowledge? Therefore, the arts are learned that they may be exercised, and they are exercised either for the help of life or for pleasure or for glory. That is not, then, the highest good which is not sought on account of itself. What difference is there whether we think that knowledge is the highest good or those things which knowledge brings forth from itself, namely, food, glory, pleasure? But these things are not proper to man and, therefore, are indeed not the highest goods, for the seeking of pleasure and food does not belong to man alone but is also of the beasts. What of the desire of glory? Is it not found in horses who exult when they are victors and grieve when they are overcome?

'So great is the love of praise; victory is such care,'⁴ and not without merit does the supreme poet say that it must be

⁴ Vergil, *Georgics* 3.112.

experienced, 'Both what sorrow there is for each loser and what glory for the palm.'⁵ But if those things which knowledge brings forth are common with the other animals, then knowledge is not the highest good. Besides, the fault of this definition is not a slight one because of the fact that knowledge without qualification is posited or considered absolutely. For all those happy ones will begin to be seen who have known some art, but not in truth those who have also known evil things, so that he is so happy who has learned to govern evils rather than he who has learned to amend or cure them. I ask, then, to which thing knowledge is to be referred. If it is to the causes of natural things, what beatitude will there be in store for me if I know whence the Nile rises or whatever the physicists prate about the heavens? Why is it that there is not knowledge of those things, but speculation, which varies according to the ability of the holders?

It remains that knowledge of good and evil is the highest good. Why, therefore, did he prefer to say that knowledge rather than wisdom itself was the highest good, since the signification and force of each is the same? No one, however, up to this time has said that wisdom is the highest good, a thing which could have been said better. For knowledge is too little for undertaking good and avoiding evil, unless there is virtue present also. For although many philosophers discussed goods and evils, they spoke, however, differently from the way they lived under nature's forcing, because they lacked virtue. But virtue joined with knowledge is wisdom.

There remains that we also refute those who thought that virtue itself was the highest good; even Marcus Tullius was of this opinion. However, they greatly failed in this consideration. For virtue itself is not the highest good but the maker and mother of the highest good, since it is not possible to arrive at that without virtue. It is easy to understand both views. I ask whether they think that good is easily come to, or whether it is reached with difficulty and labor? They may

⁵ *Ibid.* 102.

let loose their acumen and defend error. If it is possible to come to that easily and without any labor, it is not the highest good. Why do we torture ourselves, what do we accomplish by striving day and night, since that which we seek lies so ready at hand that anyone may lay hold of it without any effort of mind? But if any ordinary or mediocre good whatsoever cannot be attained without labor on our part, since the nature of goods is set in loftiness or difficulty and of evils in ease, it is necessary for the greatest labor, therefore, to be expended on the attainment of the highest good. And if this is quite true, there is need, then, of other virtue that we might come to that virtue which is called the highest good, which is incongruous and absurd, namely, that virtue might come through itself to itself. If it is not possible to reach any good except through labor, it appears that it is virtue through which it is reached, since the power and office of virtue consists in undertaking and enduring labors. Therefore, the highest good cannot be that through which it is necessary to come to something else. But since they did not know what virtue accomplished or whither it tended, and, therefore, discovered nothing honestly, they substituted in the name of virtue itself that which they said ought to be sought, even though no reward be proposed, so that they set up for themselves a good which needed a good.

Aristotle did not depart far from these when he held that virtue with honor was the highest good. As if there could be any dishonorable virtue, and as if virtue would not cease to exist if it had anything of baseness in it! But he saw that it was possible for a man with a depraved judgment to think wrongly about virtue, and, therefore, he thought that we ought to be governed by the thinking of men. But he who would do this will depart from the right and the good, since it is not in our power that virtue be honored for its own merits. For what is honorableness except perpetual honor conferred upon someone according to the report of the people? What, therefore, shall happen if evil thinking follow because of the error and

wickedness of men? Shall we cast aside virtue because it is judged wicked and base by the unwise? Since this envy can be pressed and shaken, so that it itself might be a proper and perpetual good, it ought to need no aid extrinsically, but it may rely on its own strength and stand of itself. And, therefore, not any good from man should be hoped for, nor should any evil be rejected.

Chapter 9

I come now to the highest good of true religion. Its nature must be determined in this way: first, that it belongs to man alone and not fall to any other animal; then, that it be of the soul alone and not be able to be shared with the body; finally, that it be not able to come to anyone without knowledge and virtue. This circumscription excludes and resolves all the opinions of those philosophers, for it is nothing like those things which they said. I will tell now what it is, in order that I may show that which I have resolved upon, namely, that all the philosophers were blind and foolish who were not able at some time or other to see or to understand or even to suspect what had been constituted the highest good for man. When Anaxagoras was asked what was the reason that he had been born, he answered that it was for the sake of seeing the sky and the sun. All marvel at this speech and judge it worthy of a philosopher. But I think that not having at hand what to answer, he sputtered this out at random so as not to be silent; whereas, if he had been wise, he ought to have had indeed studied and pondered this within himself, since, if anyone does not know the reason for himself, he is not even a man. But let us not think that that statement was poured out extemporaneously. Let us see in three words how many errors and how great ones he committed. Firstly, he put the whole function of man in the eyes alone, referring nothing to the mind but all to the body. What about this? If one

should be blind, will he lose the function of man? But this cannot take place without the loss of the soul. What of the other parts of the body? Will each of these be deprived of its offices? What of the fact that there is more situated in the ears than in the eyes since doctrine and wisdom can be perceived by the ears alone and cannot by the eyes alone? You have been born for the sake of seeing the sky and the sun: who has led you to this spectacle, or what does your vision confer to heaven and the nature of things? To be sure, it is that you may praise this immense and marvelous work. Confess, then, that God is the establisher of all things who has brought you into this world a witness, as it were, and a praiser of His work so mighty. You believe it is great to see the sky and the sun. Why, therefore, do you not thank Him who is the Author of this benefit? Why do you not estimate with your mind the virtue, providence, power of Him whose works you admire?

Of necessity must He be more wondrous who has done wondrous things. If someone had invited you to a banquet and you had been treated at it in an excellent manner, would you seem sane if you considered that pleasure itself of more worth than the author of the pleasure? So do the philosophers refer all things to the body, absolutely nothing to the mind, nor do they see any more than what comes under the eyes. But, nevertheless, when all the functions of the body are removed, the reason of man must be placed in the mind alone.

Therefore, we are not so born that we may see those things which have been done, but that we may contemplate the Maker of all things Himself, that is, that we may discern Him with our minds. So, if anyone should ask a man who is truly wise for what reason he was born, he will answer fearlessly and be ready to adhere to it, that he has been born of the favor of God who has generated us so that we may serve Him. Now to serve God is nothing other than to behold how good are His works and to observe justice. But that one,¹ as a man

¹ Anaxagoras.

inexperienced in divine things, reduced the greatest matter to the least by choosing only two things which he said he ought to behold. But if he had said that he was born to behold the world, although he should comprehend all things and use greater speech, however, he would not have fulfilled the function of man, because the soul is of as much more worth than the body as God is greater than the world, since God both made the world and rules it. The world, then, ought not to be beheld by our eyes, because both are bodies, but God ought to be contemplated by our souls, because God, as He is Himself immortal, has thus intended the soul to last forever. Now the contemplation of God is to venerate and worship the common Father of the human race. But if He were far removed from the philosophers, and if they were cast upon the earth in not knowing divine things, Anaxagoras must be judged to have seen neither the sky nor the sun, those things which he said he was born to see. Unencumbered and free, then, is the reason of man if he is wise, and his property is his humanity. But that very humanity, what is it if not justice? And what is justice if not piety? And piety is nothing other than the acknowledgement of God as parent.

Chapter 10

The highest good of man, therefore, is in religion alone. For the other things, even those which are thought to be proper to man, are found in other animals also. For when they discern and distinguish their own voices among themselves by proper notes, they seem to speak together. Some type of laughing also appears in these, since by a stroking of the ears and a contraction of the mouth and a movement of the eyes unto frolicsomeness, they either 'laugh' at men or at each other.¹ What of their mates and their own offspring? Do

¹ These observations reflect the scientific interpretations of the period.

they not bestow on them something like mutual love and indulgence? They surely have a providence, for they look out for things for themselves for the future and they lay away foods. Signs of 'reason' also are caught in many. For when they seek useful things for themselves, beware evil, avoid danger, and prepare hiding places for themselves opening out to several exists, certainly they manifest an 'understanding' of something.² Can anyone deny that there is reason in them when often they delude man himself? For them the work of generating is pleasant, and when they dwell in fixed abodes, fortify camps, arrange domiciles with indescribable skill, serve their king-leader, I know not whether there is in them a thorough prudence.³ It is uncertain, therefore, whether or not those things which are attributed to man are shared in common with other living animals, but, certainly, the animals are without experience of religion. In fact, I am inclined to believe that reason has been given to all the animals, but to the dumb beasts only for the guarding of life, while to man for propagating it also. And since in man that reason itself is perfect, it is called wisdom,⁴ which makes man exceptional in this, that to him alone it is given to understand divine things.

On this point the statement of Cicero is true. 'Of all kinds, there is no animal besides man which has some knowledge of God, and among men themselves there is no class, neither so meek nor so fierce, which, even though it may not know what kind of a god ought to be revered, does not know, nonetheless, that he ought to be revered. From this it is effected that he discerns God who recalls, as it were, whence he has originated.'⁵ The philosophers, therefore, who wish to set minds free from fear, take away religion also and deprive man of his own proper and singular good. And this is disjointed

² Lactantius does not have the technical distinctions of instinct, sense, cognition, etc.

³ Cf. Vergil, *Georgics* 4.149-221; also Isidore, *Origines* 12.8.1.

⁴ Cf. Cicero, *The Laws* 1.7.22.

⁵ *Ibid.* 1.8.24.

from living rightly and from all humanity, because as God subjected all living things to man, so he subjected man to Himself. Why should those same philosophers⁶ dispute that the mind ought to be directed there where the countenance is raised aloft? For if we are to look toward heaven, surely it is for nothing else but religion; and if religion is taken away, there is no connection with heaven for us. And so we ought to look toward there, or else grovel upon the ground.⁷ Not even if we wished are we able to bend down to the ground since our stature is upright. Therefore, we must look toward heaven where the nature of our body directs. If it is agreed that this ought to be done, then it ought to be done for this reason, that we serve religion, or for this, that we learn the reason or plan of heavenly bodies. But we can in no way learn the plan of heavenly things, because nothing of this sort can be discovered by speculation, as I pointed out above.⁸ Religion must be observed, therefore, and he who does not undertake this obligation prostrates himself upon the earth, and, following the life of the beasts, cuts himself off from humanity. The ignorant and unversed, then, are the wiser who, even though they err in choosing religion, have still remained mindful of their nature and condition.

Chapter 11

It is settled, therefore, by the consent of the entire human race that religion ought to be embraced. But it ought to be explained how there may be error in the embracing. God wished this to be the nature of man, that he should be desirous of and seeking after two things, religion and wisdom. But men are deceived for this reason, that they either take up religion

6 *Ibid.* 1.9.26; *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.56.140.

7 This is a favorite topic with Lactantius. Cf. *The Workmanship of God*, chs. 5 and 10 especially.

8 c. 3.

neglecting wisdom, or they are zealous for wisdom alone to the neglect of religion, although one without the other cannot be true. So they turn to many religions, false ones, for the reason that they have abandoned wisdom which was able to teach them that there could not be many gods; or on the other hand, they eagerly pursue wisdom, but that is false, too, because they have omitted the religion of the supreme God who could enlighten them unto the knowledge of the truth. Thus, men who take up one or the other follow a devious way of life and one full of the greatest errors, since both the function of man and all truth have been enclosed in these two which are inseparably connected. I wonder, therefore, that no one of those philosophers ever came forth who discovered the abode and domicile of the highest good. For thus they could seek: that whatever is the highest good is of necessity to be placed before all. Pleasure is that which is sought by all. But this is also common with the beasts; and it does not have the strength of something honorable; and it brings satiety, and harms too much; and it lessens with the advance of age; and it does not come to many, for those who lack wealth, and these are the majority, must of necessity lack pleasure also. Pleasure, therefore, is not the highest good, not even a good.¹

What of riches? It is much more obvious in this example. For they fall to the lot of very few and generally by chance, and often they come to the lazy, and sometimes they come with crime, and they are desired by those who hold them already. What of power itself? Not even is that the answer: for not all men are able to rule, and it is necessary that all be capable of the highest good. Let us seek something, then, which is proposed to all. Is it virtue? It cannot be denied that that is a good and surely a good of all. But if it cannot be blessed, since the strength and nature of it are placed in the endurance of evils, then, certainly, it is not the highest good. Let us seek another. But there is nothing more beautiful than virtue, nothing more worthy of a wise man can be found.

¹ Cf. Seneca, *On the Happy Life* 10.3.

If vices are to be shunned on account of their baseness, virtue ought to be sought on account of its loveliness. Well, then? Is it possible for that good, which is agreed to be honorable, to lack gain and reward and be so sterile that it brings forth nothing worthwhile from itself? There is great labor and there is difficulty and struggling against the evils with which this life is full, so it is necessary that it bring forth something of great good. What shall we say this is, then? Is it pleasure? Nothing base can be born from something honorable. Is it riches? Powerfulness? Those things are, indeed, frail and feeble. Is it glory? Honor? The memory of a name? But all these things are not in virtue itself, but they are placed in the consideration and judgment of others. Often virtue is detested and is afflicted with evil. Therefore, that good which is born of it ought to so cohere that it is unable to be torn apart and separated; nor can the highest good seem otherwise than if it were the property of virtue, and such that it cannot be added to or taken away from. Why is it that the duties of virtue consist in contemning all these? For not to desire, not to seek, not to love—as others do who are conquered by greed—the pleasures, wealth, powers, honors, and all those things which are regarded as goods, this is certainly the part of virtue. It brings about, therefore, something else more sublime and more outstanding, nor is there a vain resistance to these present goods, but only that one desires greater and more true ones. Let us not despair of being able to come upon it, but now let thought turn itself upon all, for the rewards sought are not light or foolish.

Chapter 12

If it is asked why it is that we are born, what virtue accomplishes, we can thus make investigation. There are two parts of which man consists, soul and body. There are many things proper to the soul; many proper to the body; many

common to both, such as is virtue itself. Whenever this is referred to the body, for the sake of distinction it is named strength. Since, then, strength lies beneath each (part of man) to each a contest is proposed, and for each a victory as a result of the contest. The body, inasmuch as it is solid and comprehensible, must fight with solid and comprehensible things; but the soul, since it is tenuous and invisible, engages with those enemies which cannot be seen or touched. What are the enemies of the soul if not desires, vices, and sins? If virtue conquers and puts these to flight, the soul will be immaculate and pure. Whence, then, can it be ascertained what strength of soul effects? To be sure, this is from a conjoined and like fortitude of the body, because when it comes against some conflict and struggle, what else does it seek from victory than life? For whether you struggle with man or with beast, the struggle is for preservation. Therefore, as the body attains this by overcoming, so that it may not perish, so does the soul, too, that it may endure; and just as the body, overcome by its enemies, is punished with death, so it is necessary that the soul, overcome by vices, die. What, then, will be the difference between the struggle of the soul and that of the body except that the body seeks temporal life and the soul eternal? If, therefore, virtue through itself alone is not happy, since its whole power consists, as I said,¹ in enduring evils; if it neglects all things which are desired as goods; if its supreme step opens unto death, inasmuch as it often scorns the life which is desired by the rest and bravely accepts the death which others fear; if it is necessary that it bring forth something of great good from itself, since labors undertaken and overcome even unto death cannot be without reward; if no reward which is worthy of it is found in life, since it spurns all things which are fragile and faltering, what else remains except that it effect something heavenly because it despises the earthly, and that it advance toward the higher things be-

¹ c. 11, p. 188.

cause it despises the lowly? That, in truth, can be nothing other than immortality.

Rightly, therefore, did Euclides, not an obscure figure among the philosophers, who was the founder of the discipline of the Megaricians, disagreeing with the others say that that is the highest good which is always alike and the same.² He knew, surely, the nature of the highest good, although he did not explain it. What is it? It is immortality and not anything else whatsoever, because that alone is able to be neither lessened nor increased nor changed. Seneca also unwarily fell upon it when he acknowledged that there is no other reward of virtue than immortality. For praising virtue in that book which he wrote on unnatural death, he said: 'Virtue is the one thing which can give us immortality and make us equals of the gods.'³ The Stoics also whom he followed deny that anyone can become happy without virtue. Therefore, the reward of virtue is a happy life, if virtue, as is rightly said, makes life happy.

Virtue should not, then, as some say, be sought on account of itself, but on account of the happy life which necessarily follows virtue. This argument could have taught them what was the highest good. This life, present, therefore, and corporal, cannot be happy, because it is subject through the body to evils. Epicurus calls a god happy and incorrupt because he is everlasting. Beatitude ought to be perfect so that there be nothing which can vex or lessen or change it, nor can anything thought to be blessed unless through its being incorrupt. And nothing is incorrupt save what is immortal.⁴ Therefore, immortality alone is blessed, since it cannot be corrupted and dissolved. Now if virtue falls to the lot of man, which no one can deny, beatitude also comes to him, for it cannot happen that he who is endowed with virtue be miserable. If beatitude comes to man, then immortality also comes, and this is to be

² Cf. Cicero, *Academics* 2.42.129.

³ Seneca, frg. 27.

⁴ Cf. Epicurus, frg. 360.

happy. Therefore, the highest good is found to be immortality alone, because it comes to no other animal or body; neither can it be reached by anyone without knowledge and virtue, that is, without a knowledge of God and justice.

How right is the seeking of this, how true it is, the very desire of this life indicates; for, although it is temporal and very full of labor, still it is sought and desired by all. And this the old as well as the young desire, kings as well as lowly men, and finally, the wise as well as the foolish. The contemplation of heaven and its light is of such great worth, as it seemed to Anaxagoras, that he would be glad to sustain any labors whatsoever. Although this life is laborious and brief, since not only by the consent of men, but also of other living things it is considered a great good, it is manifest that the same becomes the highest and perfect good if it lacks both an end and all evil. Finally, no one would have ever existed who despised this very same brief life or who underwent death unless it were with the hope of a longer life. Those who voluntarily offered themselves to be slain for the safety of the citizens, as Menoeceus of Thebes,⁵ Codrus of Athens,⁶ and Curtius⁷ and the two Mures⁸ of Rome, would never have preferred death to the advantage of life, unless they had thought that they would gain immortality in the minds of their people. Although these did not know the way of immortality, they were not deceived as to the thing itself.

If virtue, therefore, despises riches and wealth, because they are fragile, pleasures because they are short, then it also contemns a short and fragile life in order that it may attain

5 A young Theban, son of Creon. He offered himself to death because the gods required a sacrifice to ensure victory to his country's forces.

6 The last king of Athens. Victory was to be granted to the nation whose king was killed in battle, so Codrus disguised himself and attacked one of the enemy by whom he was killed.

7 Mettius Curtius threw himself into a cleft in the forum so that the gods might close up the opening.

8 These are Decius Mus, a celebrated Roman consul who devoted himself to the gods to save his country in a battle against the Latins in 338 B.C., and his son Decius who imitated his example when fighting against the Gauls and Samnites in 296 B.C.

a sure and lasting one. Thought itself, advancing in an orderly way and considering all things brings us to that exceptional and singular good for the sake of which we are born.

If the philosophers had done this, they would have preferred to gaze upon with pertinacity, that which they had once apprehended, and surely they would have arrived at this truth, as I have just shown. But if this were not the part of those who would extinguish the celestial souls of men along with their bodies, still those who discuss the immortality of the soul ought to understand that virtue has been proposed to us for the reason that, quelling our passions and overcoming the desire of earthly things, our pure and victorious souls might return to God, that is, to their origin. And for this reason, we alone of all living beings have been made erect with an outlook toward heaven so that we might believe our highest good to be in the highest realm. And, therefore, we alone take up religion so that we might know from this that the human spirit is not mortal because it knows and desires God who is immortal. Therefore, of all the philosophers, those who embraced either knowledge or virtue for the highest good held, indeed, the way of truth, but they did not arrive at the highest. For these are two which effect at the same time that which is sought: knowledge grants this, that we know how and where it might be reached, virtue that we might reach it. The one without the other is of no value: for of knowledge virtue is born, and of virtue the highest good. Therefore, there is no blessed life which the philosophers always sought and which they seek either in the worship of the gods or in philosophy, and so it could not be found by them, because they sought the highest good, not in the highest, but in the lowest. What is the highest if not heaven and God whence the soul has its origin? What is the lowest if not the earth, from which the body comes? And even though certain philosophers have given the highest good, not to the body, but to the soul, however, because they referred that to this life which terminates with the body, they were thrown back upon the body whose

entire span of time is spent on earth. Wherefore, not undeservedly, did they not comprehend the highest good, because whatever looks to the body and is wanting in immortality must necessarily be lowest. Therefore, beatitude does not fall to man in that manner in which the philosophers believed it did, but it so comes, not that he be happy then while he lives in the body which surely must become corrupt when it is dissolved, but then when his soul lives in spirit alone, liberated from the society of the body.⁹ In this alone we can be happy in this life, if we seem to be least happy; if fleeing the enticements of pleasures and serving virtue alone, we live in all trials and labors, which are the exercises and strengtheners of virtue; if, finally, we hold to that rough and difficult way which opens unto beatitude for us. Therefore, the highest good which makes men blessed cannot be except in religion and doctrine to which the hope of immortality has been joined.

Chapter 13

The matter seems to require that in this place, since we have taught immortality to be the highest good, we prove this very point, namely, that the soul is immortal. This is a matter of great debate among the philosophers, and yet those who perceived the truth about the soul were not able to explain or to prove anything. For they were without this divine instruction nor did they bring true arguments with which they might win or testimonies by which they might offer proof. We shall treat this question more suitably in the last book,¹ when we must discuss the happy life.

There remains that third part of philosophy which they

⁹ This is not a truly Catholic opinion. Our faith teaches the resurrection of the body and there will be complete fruition in heaven only when our bodies, with which we worked out our salvation, are reunited to the souls.

¹ Bk. VII, chs. 8-12,13.

call logic² in which the whole of dialectics and the entire method of speaking is contained. Divine instruction does not desire this because wisdom is not in the tongue but in the heart and it is not concerned with what sort of speech to use. For things, not words are sought. And we are discussing not grammar, not oratory, the knowledge of which is how it is fitting to speak, but we are concerned with wisdom whose doctrine is how it is necessary to live. But if that necessary plan is not physics, nor this logic either, because they cannot make one happy, it remains that the whole strength of philosophy is contained in ethics alone. Socrates is said to have devoted himself to this branch, casting the others aside. Since I have explained that the philosophers have erred in this division also, those who did not comprehend the highest good for the sake of which we were born, it appears that all philosophy is false and empty, since it does not instruct unto the functions of justice nor does it bring about the office and purpose of man. Let them know, therefore, that they err who think that philosophy is wisdom; let them not be drawn by the authority of anyone, but let them rather favor and approach the truth. This is no place for rashness; the penalty for foolishness must be undergone unto eternity, if either an inane person or a false opinion has deceived. A man, however, of whatever sort, if he believes himself, that is, if he trusts man, (that I might not speak as a fool who does not see his own error), is certainly arrogant who would dare to appropriate to himself that which the very condition of being human does not warrant. How much is the master wielder of the Latin language himself deceived, you may see from that sentence, when he said in his work *On Duties* that, 'Philosophy is nothing other than the study of wisdom, but that wisdom itself is the knowledge of divine and human things.' Then he added: 'He who vituperates this study, certainly I know not whether there is anything which he thinks should be praised. For if delight

² Up to now he has discussed metaphysics (called physics among the ancients) and ethics.

of the mind is sought and rest from cares, what can be compared with the studies of those who are always anxiously seeking for something which looks forward and has value for living well and happily? If a system of constancy and virtue is considered, either this is the art or there is none whatsoever through which we attain to these. To say that there is no art of these very great things, when of the least things there is nothing without art, is characteristic of men speaking with very little deliberation and erring in the most important matters. But if there is some discipline of virtue, where will that be sought, since you have departed from that kind of learning?³

Indeed, although I have given heed to the acquiring of some slight facility of speaking on account of the desire of teaching, yet I have never been eloquent, so that I have not even approached the forum; yet it is necessary that the very goodness of the cause should make me eloquent, a cause for the fluent and copious defending of which knowledge of the divinity and the truth itself suffices. I would wish, then, that Cicero might rise for a little while from the dead so that that most eloquent man might be taught by a small man, one not skilled in speaking. First, I would teach him whether there is anything which one who vituperates philosophy should think ought to be praised; then, that neither is that an art by which virtue and justice are learned, nor is there any other, as he thought; finally, since there is a discipline of virtue, where it should be sought for when you have departed from that kind of learning, because that one was not seeking for the sake of hearing and learning. For from whom could he hear it since no one knew it? But as he was wont to do in cases, he wanted to urge on by questioning and to lead to confession, just as though he were confident that nothing could be answered directly that would prevent philosophy from being the mistress of virtue. In fact, in the *Tusculan Disputations* he openly made profession to philosophy herself by a turn of speech, as though he

³ Cicero, *On Duties* 2.2.5f. (Cf. 1.43.153.)

were hurling himself by means of the declamatory style of speaking. 'O philosophy, leader of life,' he said, 'O searcher of virtue and router of vices! What could not only our own, but the life of all men have been without you? You are the inventrix of laws; you have been the mistress of moral customs and of discipline.'⁴ It was as though she perceived something of herself in truth, and not that He should rather be praised who bestowed her. For he could have given thanks in the same manner for food and drink, because life cannot last without these things, in which as they are of the senses there is thus nothing beneficial, but as those are nourishments of the body so is wisdom of the soul.

Chapter 14

Very rightly, therefore, did Lucretius, when he praised him who first discovered wisdom, but this ineptly, because he thought it was discovered by man, just as though that man whom he praised had found her lying somewhere, 'legs toward the source'¹ as the poets say. But if he praised the discoverer of wisdom as a god—for thus he says: 'No one, as I think, will be produced from a mortal body. For if as the majesty itself seeks the knowledge of things, it must be said that he was a god, a very god, noble Memmius,'² however, God should not thus have been praised because He discovered wisdom, but because He made man who could receive wisdom, for he lessens the praise who praises a part away from the whole. But that one gave him praise as man who on that account ought to have been regarded as a god, because he discovered how to be wise, for thus he says: 'Will it not be fitting for this man to be made worthy of the number of the gods?'³ Whence it is

⁴ Cicero, *Tusculans* 5.2.5.

¹ Cf. Ovid, *Fasti* 6.710-713.

² Lucretius, 5.6ff.

³ *Ibid.* 5.50f.

clear that he wished to praise either Pythagoras⁴ who first named himself a philosopher, as I said, or Thales⁵ of Miletus who is said to have first discussed the nature of things. Thus, while he seeks to extol the man,⁶ he pressed down the thing itself, for that is not great if it could have been discovered by man. However, pardon can be given to the poet. But that same perfect orator, that supreme philosopher—may I not insult the Greeks whose levity he always accuses and yet follows—praises wisdom itself, which sometimes he calls a gift and at others an invention of the gods, poetically shaped into likeness.⁷ Gravely, too, he complains that some have arisen who vituperated it. ‘Does anyone dare,’ he says, ‘to vituperate the parent of life, and stain himself with this parricide, and be so impiously ungrateful?’⁸ Marcus Tullius, we are parricides, and according to your judgment we ought to be sewed up in the sack,⁹ we who deny that philosophy is the parent of life. Or is it you who are ‘so impiously ungrateful’ to God? You do not venerate this one whose image is seated in the Capitol, but you venerate Him who made the world and produced man who has also bestowed wisdom itself among His other heavenly benefits. Do you call philosophy ‘the mistress of virtue’ or ‘the parent of life’? If anyone approaches her, he is necessarily much more uncertain than he was before. Of what virtue do you speak? As to where that itself is situated the philosophers are still not unconfused. Of what life is it the parent? Why, those doctors themselves have been worn out by old age and death before they have decided how it is fitting for life to be lived. Of what truth are you able to

4 Pythagoras, a Greek philosopher and mathematician of the 6th century B.C. He taught the transmigration of souls and harmony of the spheres.

5 Thales of Miletus, one of the Seven Sages who died around 548 B.C. The axiom, ‘Who hateth suretyship is sure,’ is associated with him.

6 It is generally accepted now that Lucretius was giving honor to Epicurus, for it is his system of philosophy that is expounded in Lucretian hexameters.

7 Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.26.64. (Cf. *Academics* 1.2.7.)

8 *Ibid.* 5.2.6.

9 Parricides were sewed up in sacks and drowned.

acknowledge the 'searcher,' you who often bear witness that although the multitude of philosophers is so great, still no wise man has yet arisen?¹⁰ What, then, did that 'mistress of life' teach you? Or was it so that you thus assailed that most powerful consul with maledictions and made him an enemy of the fatherland with poisoned oratory? Let us omit those things which can be excused in the name of fortune. For certainly, you studied philosophy and, indeed, to such an extent that no one ever did more diligently than you who know all discipline, to be sure, as you yourself are accustomed to boast.¹¹ And you bring the same matters to light in Latin¹² and show yourself an imitator of Plato. Tell us, therefore, that which you have learned or in what sect you have seized upon truth; surely it was the Academy, which you followed, of which you approved. But this teaches nothing except that you know that you know nothing. Therefore, your books betray you, how nothing can be learned from philosophy for life.¹³ These are your own words: 'To me, however, we seem blind, not only as regards wisdom, but even as to those things which seem to be discerned in some part, we seem sluggish and dull.'¹⁴ If philosophy is the mistress or guide of life, why, then, did you seem blind and sluggish and dull to yourself, for it was fitting for you, under her teaching, to think and be wise and to engage in the most brilliant light? How confident you have been in the truth of philosophy the precepts you arranged for your son show, in which you advise that the precepts of philosophy ought to be learned, indeed, but that he should live civilly.¹⁵ What so contradictory can be said? If the precepts of philosophy are to be learned, then, surely, they are to be

¹⁰ This must be a reference made from memory. Cf. *Orator* 5.18; *On Oratory* 1.21.94.

¹¹ Cf. *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.3.5,6; also *On Divination* 2.1.

¹² Cf. *Academics* 1.1.3; *Tusculans* 1.1.1.

¹³ Cf. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.7.17.

¹⁴ *Posterior Academics* frg. 32.

¹⁵ Letter to his son Marcus, from the incomplete book, frg. 2. The word 'civilly' has the connotation 'in the manner of a private citizen, not of a philosopher.'

learned for this reason, that we may live rightly and wisely; but, if we are to live civilly (or as becomes a private citizen), then philosophy is not wisdom since it is better to live civilly than philosophically. For if wisdom is that which is called philosophy, he will certainly live foolishly who will not live according to philosophy; but, if he does not live foolishly who lives in the manner of a plain citizen, it follows that he lives foolishly who lives in the manner of a philosopher. Therefore, according to your judgment, philosophy is condemned of foolishness and emptiness. You presented the same thing in the *Consolation*, that is, in a serious work you gave this opinion about philosophy: 'I know not what error and a miserable ignorance of truth holds us.'¹⁶ Where, then, is the magisterium of philosophy, or what did the parent of life teach you, if you are so miserably ignorant of the truth? But if this confession of error and ignorance has been wrung from the depths of your heart almost against your will, why do you not confess what is somehow true to you, that philosophy, which you extolled to the heavens with your praises while it teaches nothing, is not able to be the mistress of virtue?

Chapter 15

Seneca, influenced by the same error—for who would hold a true way when Cicero was in error?—said: 'Philosophy is nothing other than a right plan of living or the knowledge of living honorably or the art of spending a right life. We will not err if we should say that philosophy is the law of living well and honorably, and he who has spoken that rule of life has given his substance to it.'¹ This one certainly did not look to the common name of philosophy. Since this 'philosophy' is diffused among many sects and disciplines and holds nothing

¹⁶ *Consolation*, frg. 12.

¹ Seneca, frg. 17.

of certitude, nothing, in fine, about which all agree with one mind and voice, what can be so false as to have philosophy named the rule of life? For in it the diversity of precepts would impede the right way and disturb either the law of living well, whose chief points are in great disharmony, or the knowledge of a way of spending life, so that nothing else is effected in it by much contrary talk but that no one knows anything. I ask, therefore, whether he thinks that the Academy² was a philosophy or not, I do not think he would deny it. But if it is, then nothing of those things falls into philosophy; namely, that it renders all things uncertain, that it abrogates law, that it considers no art, that it distorts a rule, and completely removes knowledge. All those claims are false, therefore, since they cannot fall upon a thing always uncertain and still explaining nothing. And so there is no plan or science or law of living well unless it is constituted in this one and true and heavenly wisdom which had not been known to the philosophers. For since that earthly wisdom is false, it is varied and multiple and entirely contrary to itself. And just as one God is the establisher and ruler of this world, as the truth is one, so it is necessary that wisdom be one and simple, since whatever is true and good cannot be perfect unless it be one.

If philosophy could instruct life, no others except the philosophers would be good, and all those who had not learned it would always be evil. Since there exist innumerable people, and since there have always been those who are or have been good without any learning, while, on the other hand, since among the philosophers he has been extremely rare who has done something worthy of praise in life, who is there who does not see that those men are not learned doctors of virtue which they themselves lack? For if one were to diligently search out their morals, he will find them wrathful, grasping, lustful, arrogant, violent, and concealing their vices under cover of their wisdom, and doing at home those things which

2 The school of followers of Plato.

they had protested in the schools. Perhaps I am lying for the sake of making my accusation. But does not Tullius confess this very thing and make the same complaint? He says: 'How rarely is any one of the philosophers found to have so delayed, to be so constituted in soul and life as reason demands? Who would think his own discipline not a display of knowledge, but a law of life? Who would obey himself and submit to his own decrees? And you may see some with such great levity and agitation, that it would have been better for them not to have had the learning. And you see some desirous of money, others of glory, and many the slaves of their passions so that their speech is in strange opposition to their vices.'³

Cornelius Nepos also writes thus to the same Cicero: 'I am so far away from thinking that philosophy is the mistress of life and the perfectrix of a happy life, that I think that teachers of living are necessary to none more than to most of those who are engaged in discussing those matters. For I see that a great portion of those who in school give instructions and precepts most eloquently about modesty and continence themselves live in the passionate fulfillment of all their desires.'⁴

Likewise, Seneca in his *Exhortations* says: 'The general run of philosophers is such that they are eloquent unto their own undoing. If you should hear them perorating against avarice, licentiousness, ambition, you would think them confessed or avowed of the disclosures: to such an extent do the maledictions hurled against the public redound to themselves. It is fitting to regard these not otherwise than physicians whose labels declare remedies but whose bottles hold poison. In truth, the shame of vices does not hold certain ones, but they feign protections for their baseness, so that they might seem to sin "honorably" also.'⁵

The same Seneca said that: 'a wise man will even do that which he will not approve, in order that he may come upon

³ Cicero, *Tusculans* 2.4.11.

⁴ Nepos, frg. 46.

⁵ Seneca, frg. 18.

a passage to greater things also, nor will he abandon good customs but he will fit them to the time, and those things which others use unto glory and pleasure he will use for the sake of doing the thing.’⁶ Then a little later: ‘All the things which the luxury-loving do, and whatever the unskilled do, the wise man will do also, but not in the same way and for the same purpose.’⁷

But it matters nothing with what mind you do what it is vicious to have done, because deeds are perceived; the mind is not seen. For example, Aristippus, the master of the Cyrenaics, had the custom of being with Lais, a noble prostitute. That serious doctor of philosophy so defended this crime that he said there was much difference between himself and the other lovers of Lais, because he himself possessed Lais, but the others were possessed by her.⁸ Outstanding wisdom, this, and such as ought to be imitated by the good! Would you give your children to this man for training so that they might learn to keep a harlot? He said that there was some difference between himself and the profligate, namely, that they squandered their own goods, whereas he reveled without paying for it. In this, however, the prostitute was the more wise: she had the philosopher for a pander, that by the example and corrupt influence of the doctor, all the young men might flock to her without any disgrace. What difference did it make, then, with what intention the philosopher consorted with the renowned harlot, when the people and his rivals saw him as worse than the profligate? Nor was it sufficient so to live, but he even began to teach lustful abandon, and he transferred his own customs of the brothel to the school, expounding that pleasure of the body is the highest good. This execrable and shameful doctrine was born, not in the heart of the philosopher, but in the embrace of the prostitute. What should I say of the Cynics for whom it was a custom to hold intercourse with

⁶ *Ibid.* frg. 19.

⁷ Frg. 20.

⁸ Cf. Pseudo-Seneca, *On Customs* 3; *Proverbs* 10.11.

their wives publicly?⁹ There is no magisterium of virtue, therefore, in this training, when even those who give forth honorable precepts, either do not themselves do the things which they persuade, or if they do them, which happens rarely, it is not their training but nature which leads them on. And this very often drives even the unlearned to renown.

Chapter 16

In truth, when they give themselves to perpetual idleness and strive to reach no virtue and pass all their lives in nothing but eloquence, what should they be considered other than worthless? For unless wisdom exists in some act by which it may exercise its power, it is empty and false, and rightly does Tullius¹ prefer those civil leaders who govern the state, who establish new cities or protect with equity those already set up, who preserve the safety and liberty of the citizens with good laws or sound counsels or wise judgments to doctors of philosophy. For it is necessary for the good to act rather than shut up in corners to tell what ought to be done, precepts which those who talk do not carry out themselves. And since they have removed themselves from true acts, it is clear that they have devised the art of philosophy for the sake of exercising their tongues or providing a hobby for their minds. Those who teach only and do not act draw weight away from their own precepts. For who would obey when the instructors themselves teach not to obey? It is good to give right and honorable precepts, but unless you do them as well, it is a lie, and it is incongruent and inept to have goodness on the lips but not in the heart.

They do not seek utility, therefore, from philosophy, but delight. Cicero, indeed, testified to this. He said: 'Certainly

⁹ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.6.14.

¹ Cf. Cicero, *On Oratory* 1.8.33,34; 5.12.19; *On Duties* 1.43.44.

every disputation of theirs, although it contains the richest sources of virtue and knowledge, however, when compared with their deeds and accomplishments, I fear that it may seem to have brought not so much utility to the affairs of men as great delight for their leisure.² He should not have feared, however, when he spoke the truth, but as though he feared lest he be cited by the philosophers guilty of a betrayed mystery, he did not dare to confidently proclaim what was true, namely, that they do not carry on disputations in order to teach, but in order to amuse themselves in leisure. Since they are the authors of things which are to be done and do not themselves do anything, they must be regarded as mere talkers. But surely, because they brought nothing good to life, neither did they themselves obey their decrees, nor was anyone found in all ages who lived by their laws. All philosophy ought to be cast aside, therefore, since there ought not to be a study of wisdom which lacks end and mode. But there must be a gaining of wisdom, and that speedily. For another life is not granted to us, that when we seek wisdom in this life, we may be able to be wise in that: it is necessary that both take place in this one. It ought to be come upon quickly, that it may be quickly taken up, lest anything be lost of a life whose end is uncertain. Cicero's *Hortensius*, waxing strongly against philosophy, is circumvented in an eloquent conclusion, because when he said that the study of philosophy ought not to be, he seemed to be playing the philosopher, since it is the part of a philosopher to discuss what ought or ought not to be done in life.³

We who exalt philosophy, because it is an invention of human thought, are immune and free from this calumny. We defend wisdom, because it is a divine bestowal, and we bear witness that it ought to be accepted by all. When that one exalted philosophy, and he presented nothing better, he was thought to exalt wisdom, and so from this the more easily was

² Cicero, *The Republic* 1, frg. 5; cf. also the *Hortensius* frg. 32.

³ Frg. 19.

he driven out according to purpose, since it is agreed that man was born not unto foolishness, but for wisdom. Besides, that argument also has much weight against philosophy which the same *Hortensius* used: 'From this it can be understood that philosophy is not wisdom, because its beginning and origin is apparent. When did philosophers begin to be? Thales was first, I think. Indeed, this time is recent. When, then, among the more ancient peoples did that love of investigating the truth lie hidden?'⁴

Lucretius says the same thing: 'Finally, this nature and plan of things was discovered, but lately; and now I myself am discovered a first among the first, since I am able to turn this into the tongue of our fatherland.'⁵ And Seneca said: 'There are not a thousand years since the beginnings of wisdom were felt.'⁶ Therefore, for many ages the human race lived without the exercise of reason. But Persius mocks this saying: 'Afterwards there came to the city wisdom with pepper and palms.'⁷ As though wisdom were carried in with wares of taste!

But if this wisdom is according to the nature of man, then it must have begun with man himself, but if it is not, then human nature could not even grasp it. Since it does not receive it, then it is necessary that there was wisdom from the beginning. Philosophy, therefore, because it was not from the beginning, is not the same thing as true wisdom. But obviously the Greeks, since they had not come upon the sacred writings of truth, did not know to what extent 'wisdom' was depraved; and, therefore, when they thought that human life was without wisdom, they devised philosophy, that is, they wished to draw out the truth hidden from and unknown to themselves by discussion. And this study, through their ignorance of the true, they reckoned as wisdom.

⁴ Fig. 20.

⁵ Lucretius, 5.335ff. He refers to his work of putting Epicurus' doctrine into Latin verse.

⁶ Seneca, frg. 21.

⁷ Persius, 6.38f.

Chapter 17

I have spoken of philosophy itself as briefly as I could. Now let us come to the philosophers, not that we might strive with those who are not able to stand, but that we might pursue them fleeing and ejected from our field. The teaching of Epicurus¹ was always much more celebrated than that of the others, not because it offers something true, but because the popularity of the name of pleasure invites many. No one is inclined directly toward vices. Besides, in order to draw the multitude, he speaks his propositions according to the natural bent of each individual. He forbids the slothful to learn letters; he frees the avaricious from popular donation; he prohibits the cowardly from an advance to public life, the lazy from exercise, the timid from engaging in military service. The irreligious man hears that the gods care for nothing; the inhuman man, serving his own interests, is ordered to bestow nothing on any man, for all things that are his own concerns make him wise.² For one fleeing the crowd solitude is praised;³ one who is too sparing learns that life can be endured on water and barley.⁴ One who hates women has enumerated for him the benefits of celibacy, and childlessness is proclaimed to one who has bad children.⁵ For one who is irreverent toward his parents there is the idea that there is no bond of nature.⁶ To the impatient and delicate it is said that pain is the greatest of all evils; to the strong, that the wise man is blessed even in torments.⁷ He who is eager for fame and power is instructed to cultivate kings and royal acquaintances; he who cannot bear annoyance to shun the

1 Consult a reliable history of philosophy for an account of the systems of the ancients mentioned by Lactantius in this section. For the fragments of Epicurus, cf. Usener, *Epicurea* (edition of 1887).

2 Cf. frg. 581.

3 Cf. frg. 571.

4 Cf. frg. 467.

5 Cf. frg. 526.

6 Cf. frg. 529.

7 Cf. frg. 401.

palace.⁸ Thus, a clever man collects a group from various and diverse habits of living, and while he desired to please them all, he fought with himself with greater discord than all those did among themselves. Whence his whole teaching descends, therefore, and what origin it has must be explained.

Epicurus saw that adversities were always befalling the good: poverty, labors, exiles, loss of dear ones; that the evil on the contrary were happy, were gaining in wealth, were given honors. He saw that innocence was not safe, that crimes were committed with impunity; he saw that death raged without concern for morals, without any order or regard for years, but that some reached old age, while others were snatched away in childhood; some still robust reach the end, but others are cut off by untimely deaths in the first flower of adolescence; and in wars the better ones are conquered and die.⁹ It was especially disturbing, however, that religious men were among the first to be afflicted with the more serious evils, but upon those who either neglected the gods entirely or who did not piously reverence them, either lesser disadvantages came or none at all. Often, also, the very temples were struck with lightning. Lucretius is complaining of this, when he says of the god: 'Then he may send his thunderbolts, and himself disturb his shrines, and withdrawing into desert places, he rages as he brandishes his weapon which often passes by the guilty and strikes life from those unworthy and undeserving of death.'¹⁰ But if he had been able to catch a faint breath of truth, he would never have said that that one 'was disturbing his own abodes,' since he disturbs them for this reason, that they are not his. The Capitol, which is the supreme head of the city of Rome and of religion, not once but very often was burned, having been struck by lightning. What ingenious men thought of this is clear from a quotation from Cicero, who said that the flame 'had arisen divinely, not to destroy that

⁸ Cf. frg. 557.

⁹ Frg. 370.

¹⁰ Lucretius 2.1101-1103.

earthly home of Jupiter, but to demand one more sublime and magnificent.'¹¹ Concerning this he also said in the books *On His Consulship* the same things which Lucretius said: 'For the deep-thundering father leaning from starry Olympus sought his own citadels and noble temples and injected fire into the shrines of the Capitol.'¹²

With pertinacious foolishness, then, not only did they not understand the power and majesty of the true God, but they even increased the impiety of their error who strove to restore against every right the temple often condemned by heavenly judgment. When, therefore, Epicurus thought on these matters, as if influenced by the iniquity of those things, for so it seemed to one not knowing the cause and reason, he believed that there was no providence. When he had persuaded himself of this theory, he even undertook that it should be defended.¹³ Thus he cast himself into inextricable errors. For if there is no providence, how was the world effected so orderly, in such arrangement? 'There is no arrangement,' he says, 'for many things have been done differently from the way they should have been.'¹⁴ And a godlike man discovered what he should reprehend. If there were time to refute each single thing, I would show easily that this man was neither wise nor sane. Likewise, if there is no providence, how are the bodies of animals so ordered that each of the members disposed in a marvelous arrangement preserves its own functions? He says: 'The plan of providence has done nothing in the procreating of animals. Neither were the eyes made for seeing, nor the ears for hearing, nor the tongue for speaking, nor the feet for walking, since these were in existence before there was seeing, hearing, speaking, walking. So these things were not produced for use, but the use came from them.'¹⁵

If there is no providence, why do the rains fall, grains rise,

¹¹ Cicero, *Against Verres* 4.31.69.

¹² Cf. Cicero, *On Divination* 1.12.19.

¹³ Cf. frg. 370.

¹⁴ Cf. Lucretius, 5.195-234.

¹⁵ Cf. Lucretius, 4.822-857.

trees flower? He says that those are not for the sake of living things, since they are of no profit to providence, but all things must happen of their own accord.¹⁶ Whence, therefore, are they born, or how do all things which happen come to be? He says that it is not the work of providence. There are seeds flying about through the void, and when these have massed together at random among themselves, all things are born and grow.¹⁷ Why, then, do we not feel them or perceive them? Because they have neither color, nor heat, nor odor. They are free of taste also and moisture, and they are so minute that they cannot be cut and divided.¹⁸ Thus, the necessity of consequent things led him to wild ravings because he had undertaken falsehood in the beginning. For where or whence are those little bodies? Why did nobody save that one Leucippus dream them up, by whom Democritus was instructed, he who left the inheritance of foolishness to Epicurus? If these little bodies are indeed solid, as they say, certainly they can come under the eyes. If the nature of all of them is the same, how do they effect various things? They come together, he tells us, in varied order and position just as letters do: although they are few, yet variously arranged, they bring about innumerable words.¹⁹ But letters have various forms. So do these have commencements themselves, he says, for there are rough ones, there are hooked ones, there are smooth ones.²⁰ Therefore, they can be cut and divided if there is in them something which projects. But if they are smooth and in need of hooks or projections, they cannot cohere. They must be hooked bodies, then, for a concatenation of them to take place. But since they are said to be so minute, that they are able to be severed by no sharp blade, how do they have hooks or corners? It is necessary for them, since they exist, to be torn apart. Then, by

16 Cf. *ibid.* 5.156-194.

17 Cf. Lucretius, especially 2.1048-1066; 5.187-194; 5.416-431. Cf. also Epicurus, frg. 287.

18 Cf. Lucretius, 2.737ff.; 842-864; 1.528ff.; 599ff.

19 Cf. *ibid.* 2.478ff.; 660ff.; 688-699.

20 Cf. *ibid.* 2.333ff.; 381-477.

what pact, by what agreement do they come together among themselves that something may be formed of them? If they lack sense, they are not able to come together with such order, for it is not possible for anything but reason to bring about anything rational. With how many proofs is this vanity able to be refuted! But the harangue hastens on. This is that one who overcame humankind by his genius and eclipsed all, as the sun risen in the sky does the stars.²¹ Actually, I am never able to read these verses without a smile. For he was not saying this of Socrates, or at least of Plato, who are regarded as kings of philosophers, but about a man who, if sane and sound, raved more foolishly than any sick person ever did in a delirium. And the most inane of poets did not only adorn his mouse with the praises of a lion, but he overwhelmed and trampled him with them.²²

But Epicurus sets us free from the fear of death, expressed in these words: 'Inasmuch as we are, death is not; inasmuch as death is, we are not. Death, therefore, is nothing to us.'²³ How skillfully he deceives us! As though death that has happened, by which our senses are already destroyed, should be feared, and not the very dying in which the senses are taken away. For there is some time in which, on the one hand, we are no longer, and death, on the other, is not yet, and this itself seems to be miserable, because death begins to be and we cease to be. Not in vain has it been said: 'Death is not miserable; it is the approach to death which is miserable,'²⁴ that is, to grow weak with sickness, to endure blows, to receive a sword thrust in the body, to burn in fire, to be torn by fangs. These are the things that are feared, not because they bring death, but great pain. Rather, attempt to bring

²¹ *Ibid.* 3.1043,1044.

²² Perhaps this lengthy discoursing on Epicurean tenets has seemed excessively naïve, but in this sentence Lactantius achieves a high degree of flavor; it is an unparalleled criticism of the system and its greatest Latin poet.

²³ Diogenes Laertes, 10.125

²⁴ The editor of the Latin text assigns this statement to Seneca. Cf. *Epistle* 30.9.

it about that pain may not be evil. For he says it is the greatest of all evils.²⁵ How, then, am I able not to fear, if that which antecedes or brings about death is evil? What of the fact that that argument is completely false, since souls do not perish? But, by no means, says he, for it is necessary that that which is born with the body perish with the body.²⁶ I have mentioned above²⁷ that I am putting off this topic and reserving it for the last book, so that I may refute with divine testimony and proofs this claim of Epicurus, whether it was that of Democritus or of Dicaearchus.

That one perhaps pledged impunity for his vices, for he was an assertor of the basest pleasure, for the sake of enjoying which he claimed that man was born. Who would refrain from vices and crimes when he would hear this affirmed? For if souls are to perish, let us seek riches that we may be able to get all delights. If these are lacking to us, let us take them away from those who have them secretly, or by trickery, or by force; and this with all the more reason, if no god cares about human affairs. And inasmuch as the hope of impunity smiles upon us, let us steal, let us kill. For it is the part of a wise man to act evilly if it is both useful and safe, because, if there is any god in heaven, he does not get angry with anyone. It is the part of a fool to act in a good manner, since just as that god is not moved by wrath, so is he not touched by favor. Let us serve pleasure, then, in whatever way we can, for in a short time we will be nothing whatsoever. Let us suffer no day, therefore, no point of time to flow by for us without pleasure, lest, since we ourselves are at sometime to perish, the very fact that we live may perish. Although he does not say this in so many words, however, he teaches it in fact.²⁸ For when he holds that a wise man does all things for his own sake, he refers to his own utility all the things which he does. Thus, he who hears these infamous things, will not think

²⁵ Cf. Epicurus, frg. 401; also frg. 336.

²⁶ Cf. Lucretius 3.445-458; 634-639.

²⁷ c. 13.

²⁸ Cf. Epicurus, frg. 491.

that anything good should be done, since to do good looks to another's good. Nor will he think that he should abstain from evil, because reward or booty is joined with evil doing.²⁹ When an archpirate or leader of robbers is encouraging his men to plundering, what other speech can he use but say the same things which Epicurus says? The gods care for nothing; they are not touched by wrath or by favor; the punishments of hell do not have to be feared, because souls die after death; nor is there any hell at all;³⁰ pleasure is the greatest good; there is no human society; each one takes thought for himself;³¹ there is no one who loves another but for his own sake;³² death should not be feared by a strong man, nor any pain, because even if he is tortured, if he burns, he may say that he cares not at all about it.³³ It is evident why anyone would think this is the voice of a wise man which can be adapted most fittingly to robbers.

Chapter 18

Others, however, hold opinions contrary to these, that souls do remain after death. These are chiefly Pythagoreans and Stoics; and, although they are to be forgiven because they think what is true, yet I cannot but censure them, because they have fallen upon the truth by chance, not by knowledge. And so, on that very point which they hold rightly, they have erred. For because they feared that argument from which it might be gathered that it is necessary that souls die with the bodies, since they are born with them, they said that souls are not born but rather are put into bodies and migrate from one to another. They did not think it could be otherwise that souls should remain after the bodies unless they should seem to

²⁹ Cf. frg. 581.

³⁰ Cf. frg. 341.

³¹ Frg. 523.

³² Cf. frg. 540.

³³ Cf. frg. 601.

have existed before the bodies. Therefore, the error of each group is equal and almost similar. But this one is false in regard to the past, and the other in regard to the future (of souls). No one saw what is very true, that souls are born and yet do not die, since they did not know why this would happen or what was the reason of man. Many of those, therefore, who suspected that souls were eternal, as though they would pass into heaven, actually, of themselves brought forces against themselves. These are such examples: Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Zeno, and Empedocles, who cast himself on a stormy night into a cave of burning Actna, and since he did not appear suddenly, he was believed to have gone to the gods. And among the Romans there was Cato, who was in all his life an imitator of the Stoic folly.¹ Now Democritus was of another persuasion; still, 'of his own accord he put his head in the way of death,'² than which nothing more shameful can be done.

For if homicide is wicked because it is a destroyer of a man, he who kills himself is fettered by the same guilt because he kills a man. In fact, this ought to be judged a greater crime, the punishment of which belongs to God alone. For, just as we came into this life not of our own accord, so departure from this domicile of the body which was assigned to our protection must be made at the order of the same One who put us into this body, to dwell therein until He should order us to leave. And if some violence is exercised against us, it must be suffered with a calm mind, since the taking of life of an innocent man cannot be unavenged, and we have a great Judge to whom alone punishment in its entirety always belongs. They were homicides, therefore, all those philosophers and that prince of Roman wisdom himself, Cato, who before he took his life, is said to have read Plato's book on the eternity of souls. He was driven to the greatest crime by

¹ In connection with this reference to Cato and with this entire chapter, cf. St. Augustine, *City of God*, especially 1.23,24; 19.4; 1.17.

² Lucretius, 3.1041.

the authority of the philosopher. Still, this man seems to have had some cause for dying; it was a hatred of slavery. What of that Ambraciotes (Theombrotus),³ who, when he had read the same book, gave himself to death precipitately for no other cause except that he believed Plato? Certainly, it is an execrable teaching and one to be shunned if it drives men from life. But if Plato had known and had taught from whom, and how, and for whom, and for what reasons, and at what time immortality is granted, he would not have driven Theombrotus into voluntary death, nor Cato either, but he would have instructed them rather unto life and justice. For it seems to me that Cato sought a cause of dying, not so much to flee Caesar as to obey the teachings of the Stoics whom he was following, and to make his name famous by some grand deed. I do not see what evil could have befallen him if he lived. For Gaius Caesar, as he was clement, wished to accomplish nothing else, even in the very heat of civil war, than to seem to merit well of the republic by saving the two finest citizens, Cicero and Cato.⁴

But let us return to those who praise death as a good. You complain of life, as if you have lived, or as if reason ever determined for you why you were born at all. Has not, therefore, that true and common father of all rightly charged you with that line of Terence: 'Learn first what it is to live. If life displeases you, then it uses that.'⁵ You take it hard that you are subject to evils, as though you deserved anything good, you who do not know your Father, your Lord, your King; and, although you behold with your eyes the brightest light, yet your 'mind is blind and lies in the deep shadows of

³ Cf. St. Augustine, *City of God* 1.22.

⁴ The clemency of Caesar toward his opponents did much to make him the idol both feared and loved after his rise to power and defeat of Pompey. The suicide of Cato who refused this clemency had long been used as symbolic of the 'old' Roman hatred of tyranny. Hence, it is interesting to read this contrary opinion from the days of Rome's greatness.

⁵ Terence, *Self-Tormentor* 5.2.18,19.

ignorance.’⁶ This ignorance brought it about that there was no shame for certain ones to say that it was for this that we were born, that we should pay the penalties of the crimes. I do not see how anything more wild than this could be said. For where or what crimes could we admit who did not exist at all? Unless, perhaps, we will believe that foolish old man who lied that he had been Euphorbus in a former life.⁷ This one, I believe, because he was born of ignoble stock, adopted for himself a family from the Homeric poems. O strange and marvelously singular memory of Pythagoras, and, O, the wretched memory of all of us, who do not know who we were before! Or perhaps it was brought about through some error or a favor that he alone did not touch the whirlpool of Lethe and never tasted the water of oblivion. No doubt that silly old man, just as idle old women are wont, made up stories, as it were, for credulous children. If he had considered well those to whom he said these things, if he had realized that they were men, he would never have claimed for himself the license of lying so petulantly. The vanity of this most light-headed man ought to be derided. But what shall we do with Cicero? Although in the beginning of his *Consolation*, he had said that men were ‘born for the sake of atoning for crimes,’⁸ he reiterated the same thing afterwards as if chiding him who might think that life was not a punishment. Rightly, therefore, he declared that he was ‘held by error and a miserable ignorance of the truth.’⁹

Chapter 19

Those who treat of the good of death because they know nothing of the truth thus conclude: if there is nothing after

6 Cf. Lucretius 2.14,15.

7 Euphorbus, son of Panthus, a Trojan who wounded Patroclus and was afterwards killed by Menelaus. Cf. *Iliad* 16.806ff.; 17.45ff.

8 Cf. frg. 10.

9 Cf. frg. 12; cf. above, ch. 14, n.15.

death, death is not an evil; for it takes away the sense of evil. If, on the other hand, souls remain after death, it is even a good, for immortality follows. Cicero explained this opinion in this way in his work *On Laws*: 'Let us congratulate ourselves because death is going to bring either a better state or certainly no worse a one than that which is now ours in life, for it is divine life when the soul lives on without the body, and being deprived of the senses is certainly nothing evil.'¹ These are cleverly put, as they seem to themselves, just as if it could be nothing else. But both opinions are false. For the sacred writings teach that souls are not destroyed, but are either rewarded for justice or afflicted with everlasting punishment for sins. For it is not right that he who has been fortunate in life, though a scoundrel, escape what he deserves, nor for him who has been wretched, on account of justice, to be defrauded of his reward. Which is, indeed, so true that the same Tullius in the *Consolation* proclaimed that the just and the wicked do not inhabit the same abodes. 'For those wise men believed that not the same course to heaven opened out to all,' he said. 'They taught that those contaminated with vices and crimes were thrust into darkness and lie in mire, but that the holy souls, pure, unmarred, incorrupt, embellished also with good studies and the arts, by a certain gentle and easy passage fly to the gods, that is, to a nature like to their own.'²

This sentiment is repugnant to that earlier argument. For that is so taken, that it is necessary that every man born be endowed with immortality. What difference, then, will there be between virtue and crime, if it makes no difference whether someone is Aristides or Phalaris, whether he is a Cato or a Catiline?³ But only he who holds the truth discerns this

¹ Frg. 3, Vahlen would have this supply the lacuna in *Laws* 2.21.53,54.

² *Consolation* frg. 15.

³ The names recall striking contrasts. Phalaris was a tyrant; Aristides was an Athenian renowned for his integrity. In Roman politics Catiline was a fifth columnist, a gangster; whereas, Cato referred to above (c. 18, n. 4) is a symbol of adherence to old Roman ideals of honor.

repugnance of things and sentiments. If someone asks us, then, whether death is good or evil, we will answer that its quality depends on the purpose or reason of life. For, as life itself is a good if lived with virtue, and an evil if lived with crime, so also must death be weighed according to the actions of the life that has gone before it. Thus it happens that, if a life has been spent in the religion of God, death is not an evil, because it is a carrying across to immortality; but, if it has been otherwise, then it must be evil, since, as I said, it consigns one to eternal punishment.

What, then, shall we say except that they err who either seek death as a good or avoid life as an evil? Only that they are most unjust who do not weigh fewer evils by more goods. For when they pass an entire life in exquisite and varied pleasures, they desire to die if by chance anything of bitterness comes upon them, and they so consider life as though it had never been well with them, if things should at some time go badly. Therefore, they condemn all of life and think that it is full of nothing other than evils. Hence, arose that foolish opinion that this is death which we think is life, and that that which we fear as death is life: thus, the first good is not to be born; the second, to die quickly.⁴ In order that this statement might be of greater authority, it is attributed to Silenus.⁵ Cicero in his *Consolation* says it is 'best by far not to be born, and not to come up against these rocks of life, but, if you are born, it is next best to escape as it were from the fire of fortune as quickly as possible.'⁶ It is clear that he believed that very foolish saying, because he added something of his own that he might adorn it. I wonder, therefore, for whom he thinks it is best not to be born, since there is no one at all who may be sensible of it, for the senses effect that something be good or bad. Then, why did he think that all life was nothing else than rocks and burning? As if it were in our power either

⁴ Cf. Cicero, *Republic* 6.14.

⁵ Cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.48.114.

⁶ *Consolation* frg. 11.

not to be born, or that chance bestowed life on us, not God, or that the plan of living might seem to have some similarity to a burning.

That theory of Plato's is not dissimilar, because he said that he was thankful to nature, first, because he was born a man rather than a dumb beast; then, because he was a man rather than a woman, a Greek rather than a foreigner; and, finally, because he was an Athenian and of the time of Socrates.⁷ It cannot be said how great the blindness for minds, how many the errors to which ignorance of the truth gives birth. I would certainly contend that never in human affairs was anything more foolishly said. Indeed, had he been born, for example, a foreigner or a woman or an ass, would he have been Plato himself and not that very thing or person which he had been born? But he believed Pythagoras, of course, who, as he forbade men to feed on animals, said that souls from bodies were going about and moving into the bodies of animals. This is both stupid and impossible: stupid, because it was not necessary to bring old souls into new bodies, since the same Artificer who had made the first at one time could always make new ones, and impossible, because a soul of right reason is not able so to change the nature of its state, as fire is able to pour forth its flame in the manner of a river, now downwards, now across. Therefore, a wise man believed that it could happen that the soul which was then in Plato was enclosed within some dumb beast and was endowed with human sense so that it understood and grieved that it was burdened with an unsuitable body. How much more sanely he would have acted if he said that he gave thanks that he had been born docile, that in those resources he was liberally educated! But because he was born at Athens, what benefit was there in that? Did not many men rise up in other states of excellent ability and training who were better individually than all the Athenians? How many thousands of men may we believe that there were born at Athens and in the time of

⁷ Cf. Plutarch, *Life of Marius*, c. 46.

Socrates who were, however, foolish and unlearned? For it is not the walls or the place in which a man leaves the womb that confers wisdom upon him. What was the point of his congratulating himself that he was born in Socrates' time? Could Socrates impart genius to his pupils? It did not come into the mind of Plato that Alcibiades⁸ and Critias⁹ had been assiduous hearers of the same Socrates, one of whom was the most bitter enemy of his fatherland, and the other the cruelest of all tyrants.¹⁰

Chapter 20

Let us see now what there was so great in Socrates himself that a wise man deservedly gave thanks that he had been born in his time. I do not deny that he was a little more prudent than the others who thought that the nature of things could be grasped by their ability. In this I do not think that they were only imprudent but also impious, because they wanted to thrust their curious eyes¹ into the secrets of that heavenly providence. At Rome and in many cities, we know that there are certain sacred things which it is not right for a man to behold. They refrain, therefore, from the sight of those objects which it is not lawful for them to contaminate, and if by chance or error or some accident a man has beheld them, the crime is expiated first by his punishment, then by starting the sacrifice again. What would you do with these who wish to investigate the unfathomable secrets? Surely, those who seek to profane the hidden things of the world and its heavenly temple by their unholy disputations are much more wicked than one who has entered the temple of the Bona Dea, or Vesta, or Ceres. Although it is not right for men to enter these

⁸ Alcibiades was guilty of many rash and irreverent acts against Athens and her gods.

⁹ Critias, a Sophistic pupil of Socrates, became one of the thirty tyrants responsible for a reign of terror.

¹⁰ Cf. Cicero, *On Oratory* 3.34.139.

¹ Cf. Cicero, *On the Responses of Soothsayers* 17.37.

shrines, still they were made by men. These, however, not only escape the charge of impiety, but what is much less worthy, they attain the fame of eloquence and the glory of genius. Suppose they were able to investigate something? They are as foolish in sticking at it as they are wicked in seeking, since they are not able to find anything, nor to defend it, even if they should find something. For if they should seek the truth, even fortuitously, which happens quite often, they incur fault, so that it is refuted as false by others. For someone does not descend from heaven to bring sentence on the opinions of individuals. Wherefore, no one doubts that those who hunt up those things are fools, mad, and insane. Therefore, Socrates had something of a human heart, who, when he understood that these things could not be found out, removed himself from questions of that sort, and I am afraid that it is so in that regard only. For there are many things about him not only not worthy of praise, but even most worthy of censure, in which he was most like his own. From his words I will select one which is approved by all. Socrates had this famous proverb: 'What is above us, is nothing to us.'² Let us fall upon the earth, therefore, and let us change into feet the hands given to us for brilliant works; heaven means nothing to us, to the contemplation of which we have been raised up; finally, the very light itself pertains to us not a bit. But certainly the cause of our way of life is from heaven. If he perceived this, he was not able to understand that there should be no discussion about heavenly things, nor could he even grasp the reason of those things which he had under his feet. What then? He did not err in words, did he? It is not very probable, but he realized, to be sure, that which he spoke, that we should not have regard for religion. If he said this openly, no one would allow it.

For who does not realize that this world, perfected in so marvelous a way, is governed by some providence, since there is nothing which is able to exist without some moderator? So

² Minucius Felix, c. 13.1.

a house, deserted by an inhabitant, will fall to ruin; a ship without a pilot is wrecked; and a body left by the soul disintegrates. Much less may we believe that such a great mass as that could be constructed without an artificer or stand without a ruler. But if he meant to overturn those state religions, I do not disapprove; rather, I will even praise him if he has come upon what is better. But the same man swore by a dog and a goose. 'O idler of a man,' as Epicurean Zeno says, 'foolish, lost, and desperate if he wanted religion mocked; he was demented if he did this seriously, to hold the lowest animal in the place of a god!'³ Who would dare to reprehend now the superstitions of the Egyptians which Athenian Socrates confirmed on his own authority? Was not that the highest vanity which he asked of his intimate friends before his death, that they offer a cock to Aesculapius which he had vowed? He was afraid, of course, that in the presence of Rhadamanthus, the receptor or receptionist, he would be made guilty of that vow by Aesculapius.⁴ I would think the man demented, if he had died as a result of sickness. But since a sane man did this, then he is insane who thinks that that one was wise. And a wise man would congratulate himself for having been born in his time!

Chapter 21

Let us see, then, what Socrates taught that one, who, when he had repudiated the whole of physics,¹ presented himself there that he might make inquiry about virtue and duty. So, I do not doubt that he instructed his hearers with the precepts

³ Cf. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.34.93; Tertullian, *Apology* c. 14; Minucius Felix, c. 38.5.

⁴ Cf. Tertullian, *Apology* c. 46.

¹ Here is meant the natural philosophy of the ancients. For chapter 21 and also chapter 22 cf. Book 4 of Cicero's *Republic*. Lactantius very probably made use of this. Cf. also Salvian, *The Governance of God* 7.101-105.

of justice. Under the teaching of Socrates, therefore, it did not escape Plato that the strength of justice consists in equity, if, indeed, all are born in an equal condition. 'Therefore,' he said, 'let them have nothing private and personal, but that all may be equal, which the system of justice desires, let them possess all things in common.'² This can be taken, as long as it seems to be money that is under discussion. And this, itself, I was able to show in many ways how impossible and how unjust it is. Still, let us grant that it can be done, for all will be wise men and despise money. Where, then, did that idea of community lead him? 'Marriages also ought to be common,'³ he said, meaning that many men, as though dogs, might come upon the same woman, and that he, of course, might obtain the prize who has overcome with his strength; or, if they are patient, as philosophers, they may wait and go in turn as if to a house of ill-repute. Marvelous equity of Plato! But where is the virtue of chastity? Where conjugal faith? If you remove these, all justice is taken away.

But the same man said that the states would be happy if either philosophers would rule or if kings would become philosophers.⁴ Would you give the ruling power to this man so just, in truth, so fair, who would have taken away their goods from some, who would have bestowed on others possessions not their own, who would have prostituted the virtue of women, things which not only no king ever did, but not even any tyrant? What reason, therefore, for this most base advice did he offer? 'In this way,' he said, 'the state will be in concord and bound with the chains of a mutual love, if all are the husbands and fathers and wives and children of all.'⁵ What a confusion of humankind this is! How can charity be preserved where there is nothing certain which may be loved? What man may love a woman or what woman a man unless they have lived always together, unless a devoted mind and

² Plato, *Republic* 416D.

³ *Ibid.* 457C.

⁴ *Ibid.* 473D.

⁵ *Ibid.* 463Cff.

faith kept by and for one another has built up individual charity? This virtue does not have place in that promiscuous pleasure. Likewise, if all are the children of all, who will be able to love sons as his own, since either he does not know his own or he is doubtful of them? Who will bring honor to his father, as it were, since he does not know of whom he has been born? From this it happens that, not only does he take another for his father, but he may even hold his father as a stranger. Because a wife may be common, why cannot a son be so? But it must needs be that he be conceived from one. Therefore, the idea of community perishes for that one through nature herself as the reclamer. There remains, then, that it is only for the reason of concord that he wishes that wives be common. But there is no more vehement cause of discord than the seeking of one woman by many husbands. If Plato could not be advised of this by reason, surely he could by the examples both of the dumb animals which fight most bitterly on account of this, and also of men who have always waged most severe wars among themselves for the same reason.

Chapter 22

It remains that that community of wives holds nothing else but adultery and lusts, for the complete uprooting of which virtue is especially necessary. Therefore, he does not find that concord which he sought, because he did not see whence it comes. For justice in things placed outside has no worth; it is not even concerned with the body, but it is engaged entirely in the mind of man. He who wishes to make men equal, then, ought to withdraw not matrimony, not wealth, but arrogance, pride, boastfulness, so that those powerful and elated men may know that they are the equals of even the most beggarly. For when insolence and iniquity are removed from wealth, it will make no difference whether some are rich and some are poor,

since their spirits will be equal, and nothing besides the religion of God can effect this. He thought that he had discovered justice when he was turning it over absolutely, because community ought to be not of fragile things but of minds. For if justice is the mother of all virtues, when those single ones are taken away, she herself is subverted. Plato put frugality before all things, but surely there is no frugality where nothing of one's own property is had. He advocated abstinence, if only there were nothing of another's from which to abstain. He presented temperance, and he offered chastity, virtues which are very great in both sexes; he upheld reverence, shame, modesty, if things can begin to be honorable and legitimate which are accustomed to be judged wicked and base. Thus, while he wishes to give virtue to all, from all he takes it away.

For ownership of things contains the matter of virtues and vices, but community holds nothing other than the license of vices. Nothing else can be said of the men who have many wives than that they are wanton and prodigal. Likewise, the women who are possessed by many, are, to be sure, not adulteresses, since there is no certain matrimony, but it is necessary that they be prostitutes and harlots. He reduced human life, therefore, to a likeness, I will not say of dumb animals, but of beasts and cattle. For almost all the birds make and form equal marriages and they defend their nests as though nuptial chambers with unified feeling, and they love their offspring because they are certainly their own, and they drive out any others if you should slip them into the nest. But a 'wise' man, against the custom of men and against nature, chose for himself more foolish things to imitate, and because he saw that in other animals the functions and duties of males and females were not different, he thought it was necessary also for women to engage in military service, to take part in public businesses, to hold magistracies, and to undertake commands. So he assigned to them arms and horses. The consequence is that spinning and weaving and the feeding of infants would belong

to men. Nor did he see that the things he said were impossible, and for this reason, that up to now upon the earth no race so foolish nor one so wise ever existed which lived in this manner.

Chapter 23

Since the leaders of the philosophers are themselves caught in such great vanity, what are we to think of those lesser figures? They are accustomed to seem to themselves never so wise as when they glory in a contempt of money. 'A strong spirit.' But I dread what they are doing and whither that contempt may lead. The patrimony bequeathed to them by their parents they shun and give up as if it were an evil, and lest they suffer shipwreck in a storm, they willingly hurl themselves into the deep, not with courage, but strong in a perverse fear, just as those, who when they fear that they will be strangled by an enemy, strangle themselves so as to avoid death with death.¹ Thus, such as those, whence they could acquire the glory of liberality, lose it without honor and without grace. Democritus is praised because he relinquished his fields and allowed them to become public pasturage. I would approve if he had made the gift. For nothing is done wisely, which, if it is done by all, is not useful and is an evil. But this negligence is tolerable. What of that one who poured into the sea his patrimony which he had reduced to coins?² I am doubtful whether or not he was sane, or whether he was demented. 'Go away,' he said, 'into the sea, ye evil desires. I will submerge you, lest I myself be submerged by you.' If the contempt of money is so great, make that a benefit, make it a kindness, bestow it upon the poor: you can succor many with this which you are about to lose, lest they die of hunger

¹ Cf. Martial, 2.80.

² The reference here is to Crates, a Theban, and a Cynic philosopher, pupil of Diogenes. The account is given also by Jerome, *Against Jovinian* 2.

or thirst or exposure. Imitate the madness at least and the fury Tuditanus.³ Scatter to the people what is to be taken away. You can both escape money and yet lay it up well, since whatever is of service to many is safe. But who approves of the comparable sins of Zeno?⁴ Let us pass over that which has always been laughed at by all. That is enough for exposing the error of a wild man, the fact that between vices and illnesses he places pity. He takes away from us affection in which almost the entire reason of human life is contained. For although the nature of man is weaker than that of the other animals which a heavenly providence has strengthened with natural protections, either for enduring the force of the seasons or for warding off attacks from their bodies, because none of those has been given to man, in place of all these he has received the affection of pity which is usually called humanity, by which we ourselves protect each other. For if a man were made savage at the sight of another man, which we see in the case of animals whose nature is a roving or wild one, there would be no society of men, no care or plan of founding cities, so not even life itself would be safe enough, since the weakness of men would be exposed to the other animals on the one hand, and they would rage among themselves according to the manner of wild beasts.

The madness is not less in others. What can be said of him who said that snow was black? In consequence of that he would also say that pitch was white! This is that one who said that he was born for this reason, that he might see the sky and the sun,⁵ who, although the sun was shining, saw nothing on the earth. Xenophanes very foolishly believed the mathematicians who said that the circle of the moon was eighteen times greater than the earth, and what was in accord with this foolishness, he said that within the concave bosom

³ Cf. Cicero, *Philippics* 3.6.

⁴ The reference here is very probably to Zeno of Cyprus (335-263 B.C.), the founder of the Stoic school. According to his ethical teachings the only real good is virtue.

⁵ Cf. ch. 9.

of the moon there was another earth, and that there another kind of men lived in a way similar to that in which we live on this earth.⁶ Those moon-dwelling men have, then, another moon which puts forth for them a nocturnal light as this one does for us, and perhaps this world of ours is the moon of another lesser earth. Seneca said that there was one among the Stoics who deliberated whether or not people were on the sun also.⁷ He acted foolishly, indeed, who questioned this. For what would he lose, if he had assigned men to dwelling there? But I suppose the heat deterred him lest he commit such a great multitude to danger, so that if they had perished from too much heat, such a great calamity might not be said to have come about through his fault.

Chapter 24

Well, then, those who think that the antipodes are placed directly opposite us do not say anything at all, do they? Or is there anyone so foolish as to believe that there are men whose footprints are higher than their heads? Or that the things which lie straight out with us hang upside down there; that grains and trees grow downwards; that rain and snow and hail fall upwards upon the earth? Does anyone wonder that hanging gardens are related among the seven wonders, when philosophers make fields and cities and seas and mountains 'hanging'? We must open out the origin of this error.¹ For men are always deceived in the same way. Since, led on by a likeness of the truth, they have taken hold of something false in the beginning, it is necessary for them to run into those errors which follow. Thus, they fall into many ridiculous

⁶ Cf. Cicero, *Academics* 2.26.82; 39.123.

⁷ Seneca, frg. 22.

¹ For comment on the material of Chapter 24 refer to St. Augustine, *The City of God* 16.9; Isidore, *Origines* 9.2.133.

things because those things which are congruent with false things must be false. Although they have put faith in the first, they do not perceive what sort are those which follow, but they defend them in every way, even though they ought to judge whether the first things are true or false from those that follow. What reason, therefore, led them to the antipodes? They saw the courses of the stars wandering into the decline or setting, and they saw the sun and moon always setting into the same direction and rising from the same direction. But when they did not perceive what machination directed their courses or how they returned from setting to rising, and since they thought that the sky itself was sloping into all directions (it is necessary for it to seem so on account of its immense expanse), they believed that the world was round like a pillar; and they thought that the heavens revolved from the motion of the stars; and, thus, the stars and the sun, when they set, were brought back to their rising by the very whirling of the world. And so they fabricated aerial orbs, as it were, according to the form of the world, and they adorned them with certain portent-like images which they said were stars. That followed this roundness of the sky, therefore, so that the earth might be enclosed in the depths of its center. But if this were so, that the earth itself also is like a globe, neither could it be possible that what was held enclosed by roundness should not be round. If, however, the earth were also round, it is necessary that it bear the same appearance into all the parts of the sky, that is, that it put up mountains, stretch forth plains, spread out seas. If this were so, then that last point also would follow, that there is no part of the earth which is not inhabited by men and other animals. Thus, the roundness of the heavens comes up against those hanging antipodes. But if you ask those who defend these portents how, then, all things do not fall into that lower part of the sky, they will answer that this is the nature of things, that weights be borne into the middle and that all things be connected at the center, just as we see the spokes in a wheel; things which are light, however, as

clouds, smoke, and fire, are scattered from the center, so that they might seek the sky.²

I do not know what to say about those who, when once they have gone astray, constantly remain in their foolishness and defend their empty theses with empty prattling, except that sometimes I think that they philosophize for the sake of a joke, or that cleverly and knowingly they take up lies to defend them, so that they might, as it were, exercise or demonstrate their abilities in evil things. But I could prove by many arguments that it is in no way possible for the sky to be below the earth, except that this book must be concluded now and there still remain some points which are more necessary to the present task. And since to run through the errors of individuals is not within the scope of one book, let it be enough to have enumerated a few, from which it can be understood of what sort the others are.

Chapter 25

Now we must say a few things about philosophy in general in order that after establishing our case we may conclude. That greatest writer of ours, an imitator of Plato, believed that philosophy was not ordinary because none except learned men can attain to it. He says: 'Philosophy is content with few connoisseurs and flees the crowd of her own choice.'¹ It is not wisdom, therefore, if it shrinks from the company of men, because wisdom, if it is given to men, is given without discrimination to all, so that there is no one absolutely who can-

² Lactantius seems especially primitive and naïve when he sets about explaining natural phenomena that are part of our scientific inheritance for long ages now. It may be pertinent here to note that Lactantius may have been attempting to show that for the true Christian there was no conflict between faith and reason even in the fourth century before the strengthening of motives of credibility through real scientific progress.

¹ Cicero, *Tusculans* 2.1.4.

not receive it. But they so embrace the virtue given to the human race, that they alone of all seem to enjoy a public good; they are as envious as if they wished to blind the eyes of others or dig them out lest they see the sun. For what else is it to deny wisdom to men than to take away from their minds the true and divine light?² But if the nature of man is capable of wisdom, it is necessary that workmen and rustics and women and all who have human form be taught, that they might be wise, and that a people of sages be raised up from every tongue and condition and sex and age. So it is the greatest argument that philosophy neither tends to wisdom nor is itself wisdom, because its mystery is celebrated only by the beard and the pallium.³ So the Stoics realized this, for they said that slaves and women ought to engage in philosophy; Epicurus, also, who called those without any training in letters to philosophy; and likewise Plato, who wished to compose a state of wise men. Indeed, they tried to do what truth exacted, but it was not possible to get beyond the words, first, because there is need of many arts to be able to arrive at philosophy. Those common letters must be learned because of the need of reading, since such a great variety of things can neither be learned by hearing nor contained in the memory. Not a little attention has to be given to grammar, too, that you may know the correct manner of speaking; for this many years are necessary. Oratory should not be neglected either, so that you may be able to profess and give out those things which you have learned. Geometry, also, and music and astronomy are necessary, because these arts have some alliance with philosophy. Women are not able to learn all these arts because during their growing years they have to learn the duties that will soon come with homemaking; neither can slaves learn them, for these must do service during the years in which it is possible for them to learn; nor can the

² Cf. Epicurus, *frag.* 227a.

³ Horace states that philosophers cultivated beards to study the Stoic philosophy (cf. *Satires* 2.3.35), and the pallium is still regarded as a symbol of a revered and holy office.

poor or workmen or rustics, by whom a living must be sought by labor day by day. For this reason Tullius says that philosophy 'shrinks from the crowd.'⁴

Still, Epicurus will accept the untutored. How, therefore, will they understand those things which are said about the beginnings of things, perplexing and involved things which even educated men scarcely grasp? In matters involved with obscurity, then, and spread over by the variety of abilities and colored with the exquisite oratory of eloquent men, what place is there for the inexperienced and unlearned? Finally, they never taught any women to be philosophers except one, from all memory, Themistis,⁵ nor any slaves except one Phaeton,⁶ whom, though a poor slave, they are said to have redeemed and taught. They enumerate also Plato and Diogenes. These were not slaves, however, but slavery had come upon them, for they were captured. A certain Anniceris is said, indeed, to have redeemed Plato for eight sesterces. And so Seneca railed at that very redeemer with reproach, because he estimated Plato at a small price.⁷ He was crazy, as it seems to me, who was angered at the man because he did not lose much money. Or, I suppose, he ought to have weighed out his gold as if for the dead Hector⁸ or to have piled on as many coins as the seller did not even demand. Of the barbarians, however, they had no one except one Anacharsis, of Scythia,⁹ who would not even have dreamed of philosophy except that he had learned language and letters before.

⁴ Cicero, *Tusculans* 2.14.

⁵ This is the same as Themis or Themista, the goddess of justice and prophecy.

⁶ A disciple of Socrates, bought by him from pirates.

⁷ Seneca, frg. 23; cf. also Gellius, *Attic Nights* 2.18.

⁸ The dead body of Hector was ransomed by his aged father, Priam.

⁹ Called one of the seven wise men. He spent time in Athens with Solon. When he returned to Scythia he attempted to introduce Athenian laws and was killed by his brother who was then king (c. 592 B.C.).

Chapter 26

What those men realized under the demand of nature ought to be done, but which they themselves, however, were not able to do, and which they saw could not be done by the philosophers, this heavenly doctrine alone accomplishes, because it alone is wisdom. Were those men able to persuade anyone who do not persuade even themselves of anything? Or will they check the desires of anyone, will they temper wrath, will they restrain passion, when they themselves yield to vices and admit that nature is the stronger? But daily experience shows how much the commands of God, since they are simple and true, accomplish in the hearts of men. Give me a man who is wrathful, evil speaking, uncontrolled; with very few words of God I will render him 'as gentle as a lamb.'¹ Give me one who is avaricious, grasping, and I will soon give him to you liberal and bestowing his money with bountiful hands. Give me one fearful of pain and death; now he will despise the cross and fire and the bull of Perillus.² Give me one lustful, an adulterer, a debauché; then you will see him sober, chaste, continent. Give one cruel and seeking blood, and that fury will be changed into real clemency. Give an unjust, foolish sinner, and immediately he will be just and prudent and innocent, for with one washing all malice will be wiped out.³ So great is the power of divine wisdom that, once infused into the breast of man, it expels folly, the mother of transgressions, at one blow, and there is no need of pay, of books, or of night work and long study to accomplish this. Those results are effected freely, easily, quickly; only let the ears be opened and let the heart thirst for wisdom. No one need fear. We do not

¹ Terence, *The Brothers* 4.1.18

² This is the name used of a usurer in Horace.

³ It is interesting to note that in referring to the sacrament of baptism here Lactantius uses a Latin term, *lavacrum*. Evidently the transliteration of the Greek, *baptismus* had not become established as the only term. Cf. the article on this word in Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Française des Auteurs Chrétiens*, Paris, 1954.

sell water, nor do we hold forth the sun as a reward. The font of God, very rich and exceedingly full, lies open to all, and this celestial light arises for all men who have eyes. Has any one of the philosophers ever offered this, or is he able to make the offer if he wished? Although they may wear out their lives in the study of philosophy, they can make neither anyone else nor themselves even any better if nature presents the least obstacle. And so their wisdom, although it may accomplish very much, does not wipe out vices, but it covers them over. But the few commands of God so change the whole man and render him new when the old has been put off that you do not recognize him to be the same.⁴

Chapter 27

But, do they give nothing similar, then, in the way of instruction? In fact, they give very many precepts, and frequently they approach to the truth, but those precepts have no weight, since they are human and lack the greater authority that is divine. No one believes, therefore, since he thinks that he who is listening is a man just as is he who gives the precept. Besides, there is nothing certain about them, nothing which may come from knowledge; but, when all things are a matter of conjecture and many things even diverse and varied are put forth, it is the mark of a very foolish man to want to obey their precepts, precepts of which it may be doubted whether they are true or false. No one obeys, therefore, since no one wishes to labor at the uncertain. The Stoics say that it is virtue which alone effects the happy life. Nothing can be more true. But what if one will be tortured or afflicted with pain? Will anyone be able to be happy among executioners? Rather, indeed, is pain brought upon the body the matter of virtue, and so not even in torments is he miserable. Epicurus was

⁴ Cf. St. Paul, *Ephes.* 4.22f. Cf. also Cyprian, *Testimonies* 3.11; Tertullian, *The Resurrection* c. 45.

much more strong in saying: 'The wise man is always happy, and even enclosed in the bull of Phalaris, he will utter this word: "It is pleasant and I care nothing."'¹ Who would not mock him, especially because a voluptuary placed upon himself the character of a strong man, and even beyond measure?² For it cannot be that someone would consider the tortures of the body as pleasures, since it is enough for fulfilling the duties of virtue to endure and sustain them. What are you saying, you Stoics? What do you say, Epicurus? 'The wise man is happy even when he is tortured.' If it is on account of the glory of patience, he will not enjoy it for perhaps he will die in torments; if it is on account of memory, either he will not perceive it if souls die, or if he will know it, nothing will follow from it.³

What other fruit is there in virtue, then? What is the blessedness of life? 'That one may die with an undisturbed mind.' You offer to me a good of one hour or perhaps of a moment, for which it is not expedient to be afflicted with miseries and labors throughout all of life. How much time does death take? When it comes, whether you undergo it with an even or a disturbed mind makes no difference now. So it comes about that nothing else is seized from virtue except glory. But this is either fleeting and brief, or it will not follow upon the wicked judgments of men. There is no fruit of virtue, then, when virtue is mortal and frail. Those who said these things saw a certain shadow of virtue; they did not see virtue itself. For they were fastened upon the earth, nor did they raise their countenances aloft so that they might behold her who was showing herself 'from the regions of heaven.'⁴

This is the reason why no one obeys their precepts, since they either instruct unto vices if they defend pleasure; or, if they lay claim to virtue, they neither threaten penalty for sin except that of disgrace alone, nor do they promise any

¹ Cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 2.7.17; 5.10.31; 26.75.

² Cf. Epicurus, frg. 601; also Cicero, *Tusculans* 2.7.18; 5.31.88.

³ *Ibid.* 2.7.18; 5.26.73,74.

⁴ Lucretius, 1.64.

reward for virtue except that of honor and praise, although they say that virtue ought to be sought after, not on account of something else, but on account of itself. The wise man is happy in torments, therefore, but when he is tortured for the faith, for justice, for God, that patience under pain will make him most happy. For it is God who alone can honor virtue whose reward is immortality alone. Those who do not seek it and who do not hold to religion, to which eternal life is subject, certainly neither know the power of virtue (of the rewards of which they are ignorant), nor do they look into the heavens (which they think they are doing when they seek into things not able to be investigated), for there is no reason for looking into heaven other than to accept religion or to believe that one's own soul is immortal. Whoever knows that God is to be worshiped or who has the hope of immortality set before himself, has his mind in heaven; and, although he may not behold it with his eyes, however, he does behold it with the light of his soul. Those who do not accept religion are earthly, since religion is of heaven; and those who think that the soul perishes with the body, look out upon the earth evenly, because beyond the body, which is earth, they see nothing more which is immortal. It is of no advantage, therefore, that man is so fashioned that he gaze into the heavens with an erect body, unless he discern God with an upright mind and unless his whole thought be engaged in the hope of perpetual life.

Chapter 28

Wherefore, there is nothing else in life on which our reason, our condition depends, except the knowledge of the God who produced us and religious and devoted worship. And since this is whence the philosophers went astray, they were surely not wise. They sought wisdom, of course, but because they did not seek rightly, they fell too far and came into such great

errors that they held on to not even common wisdom. For not only did they not want to claim religion, but they removed it also, while induced by the appearance of false virtue they tried to set minds free from all fear. This overturning of religion hit upon the name of nature. For since they either do not know by whom the world was effected or wished to persuade men that nothing was accomplished by the Divine Mind, they said that nature was the mother of all things, as if they were saying that all things were born of their own accord. In this they openly acknowledge their imprudence. For nature, when divine providence and power are removed, is absolutely nothing. And if they call God 'Nature,' what perversity is it to name him Nature rather than God? If, however, nature is the plan or necessity or condition of being born, it is not something sensible of itself, but it is necessary that the mind be divine which by its own providence endows all things with the principle of being born. Or if nature is the sky and the earth and everything which has been born, then nature is not God but the work of God.

With a similar error they believe that fortune is a certain goddess, as it were, making sport of human affairs by various accidents, because they do not know whence good things and evil things come to them. Although they think that they have been arranged by this [fortune] for doing battle, still they do not give any reason by whom and on account of what cause, but they only glory that they struggle with fortune at every moment. Now whoever have consoled others on account of the death or loss of their dear ones have reviled the name of fortune with bitterest accusations, nor is there any disputation of theirs at all concerning virtue in which fortune is not attacked. Marcus Tullius in his *Consolation* tells that he has always fought against fortune, and that she had been overcome by him when he had bravely beaten back the attacks of enemies, and not even had he been broken by her then, when expelled from home, he was deprived of his fatherland. But, however, when he lost his dearest daughter, then, he confesses,

was he shamefully conquered by fortune. 'I yield,' he said, 'and I throw up my hand.'¹ What is more wretched than this man who so lies prostrate?

He talks unwisely, he who professed himself a wise man. What, therefore, does the assumption of a name mean? Why that contempt of things which is held forth in magnificent words? Why the condition or mien different from the others? Or why do you give precepts of wisdom to all, if no one has been found up to this point who is wise? And does anyone bear ill-will to us because we deny that the philosophers are wise, when they themselves confess that they do not know anything and that they are not wise? For if ever they should so fail that they might not even be able to pretend something, which they do in other matters, then, indeed, they are warned of ignorance, and they jump about raving mad, as it were, and they shout that they are blind and without intelligence. Anaxagoras declares that all things are surrounded with darkness; Empedocles complains that the paths of the senses are narrow, as though he had need of a carriage and team for thinking; Democritus, as though the truth were lying submerged in a certain well so deep that there is no bottom, speaks too foolishly also, as the others do.² For truth is not as though submerged in a well whither it was permitted him to descend or even to fall, but it is as though on the highest peak of a lofty mountain, or rather in heaven, which is most true. Why is it that he said it was pressed down to the depths rather than raised unto the heights? Unless, perhaps, he preferred to have his mind also reside in his feet or in his heels rather than in his breast or head. They were so very far removed from the truth itself that not even the state of their body advised them that they must seek truth in the heights. From this despair was that confession of Socrates born, in which he said that he knew nothing but this one thing, that he knew nothing. Hence arose that discipline of the Academy, if, however, it can be called a discipline or a school in which ignorance is

¹ Cicero, *Consolation* frg. 16.

² Cf. Cicero, *Posterior Academics* 1.12.44.

learned and taught.³ But not even those who assumed knowledge for themselves could consistently defend that fact itself, namely, that they thought that they knew. Since the plan or reason did not square for them through ignorance of divine things, they were so varied, so uncertain, and often discussing things opposed to themselves and their own theories, that you would not be able to decide and judge what they believed, what they meant. Why, then, do you fight against those men who ruin themselves with their own weapons? Why do you labor to destroy those whom their own speech punishes and destroys?

'Aristotle,' says Cicero, 'accusing the old philosophers, says that they were either extremely foolish or exceedingly glorious, who thought that philosophy was perfected by their own abilities: but they saw, because a great advance was made in a few years, that in a short time philosophy would be obviously completed.'⁴

What time was that, however? When has it been completed, or by whom? As to his saying that they were most foolish who thought that wisdom had been perfected by their abilities, it is true, but not even he judged prudently enough, who thought either that it had been begun by the ancients or increased by the recent philosophers, or that it would be perfected soon by those to follow. For never can that be investigated which is sought not through its own way.

Chapter 29

But let us take up again that which we passed by. Fortune, therefore, of itself is nothing;¹ nor must it be so regarded as though it exists in some sense, if, indeed, fortune is the sudden

³ Cf. *ibid.* 1.12.45.

⁴ Cicero, *Tusculans* 3.28.69.

¹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I,116, a discussion on fate and chance. The definition of Boethius is given: 'Fate is a disposition inherent to changeable things by which Providence connects each one with its proper order.'

and unexpected outcome of accidental things. But the philosophers, lest at some time they should not err, wish to be wise in a foolish matter; they change the sex of fortune and say that it is not a goddess, as the crowd believes, but that it is a god. Sometimes, however, they call the same thing nature, and sometimes fortune, and Cicero said that this very thing brings about much that is unexpected by us because of obscurity and ignorance of causes.² When they do not know the causes on account of which something is done, then it is necessary that they do not know him who does it. In a very serious work, in which he was giving to his son precepts of life culled from philosophy, the same man said: 'Who does not know that the power of fortune is great in both directions, for when we use its prosperous blowing, we come to desired outcomes, and when it blows back, we are afflicted.'³

First, he who denies that anything can be known said this in such a way as if he himself and all men knew. Then, he who also tries to make things which are clear dubious, thought that this was clear which to him ought to be especially doubtful, for it is absolutely false to the wise man. 'Who does not know?' he said. Indeed, I do not know. Let him teach me, if he can, what is that power, what is that blowing and blowing back. It is disgraceful, therefore, for an intelligent man to say that which he is not able to prove if you deny it. Finally, because he said: 'Assents ought to be held back, because it is the mark of a foolish man to rashly assent to unknown things,'⁴ he openly gave credence to the opinions of the mob and the unskilled who think that it is fortune who assigns goods and evils to men. They make her image with horn of plenty and rudder, as though this one assigns wealth and holds the direction of human affairs. Even Vergil assents to this opinion. He calls fortune 'omnipotent,'⁵ and the historian

² Cicero, *Posterior Academics* 1.7.29.

³ Cicero, *On Duties* 2.6.19.

⁴ Cf. Cicero, *Posterior Academics* 1.12.45; *The Nature of the Gods* 1.1.1.

⁵ Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.334.

says: 'Surely, fortune rules in all things.'⁶ What place remains, then, for the other gods? Why is not she herself said to reign if she is more powerful, or why is not she alone worshiped if she rules all things? Or if she sends evils only, let them put forward some cause why, if she is a goddess, she envies men and wishes them destroyed, since she is religiously cherished by them; why she is kinder to the evil, but more unkind to the good; why she attacks, afflicts, deceives, and exterminates; who established her as the perpetual troubler of men; why, finally, she has been allotted such evil power that 'she celebrates and obscures all things from passion more than from true worth.'⁷ The philosophers should have looked into these questions, I say, rather than rashly accuse innocent fortune. Even if this is something, still nothing can be drawn from those, why she is as unfriendly toward men as she is thought. And so all those speeches which rail against the iniquity of fortune are nothing else but the ravings of inconsiderate levity.

Wherefore, let them not envy us to whom God has disclosed the truth, for just as we know that fortune is nothing, so we know that it is a wicked and crafty spirit which is an enemy to the good and to justice, which does contrary things as a god, the cause of whose envy we discussed in the second book.⁸

This lies in wait for all, but it impedes with error those who know not God; it smothers them with foolishness; it wraps them in darkness, lest anyone be able to arrive at the knowledge of the divine name in which alone is contained wisdom and perpetual life. Those who know God, however, it attacks with trickery and cleverness so that it might ensnare them with desire or passion, so that depraved with flattering sins it might drive them to death; or, if it accomplishes nothing by guile, it attempts to cast them away by force and violence. For this reason, therefore, it was not immediately cast to punishment by God at the beginnings of transgression,

⁶ Sallust, *Catiline* 8.1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Cf. ch. 8.

in order that it might through its malice exercise men unto virtue.⁹ For unless this is practiced, unless it is strengthened by assiduous trouble, it cannot be perfect (if, indeed, the virtue of enduring evils is a strong and unconquered patience). From this it comes about that there is no virtue if an adversary is lacking.¹⁰ When they did not know the name of this perverse power, although they felt its strength repugnant to virtue, they made for themselves the inane name of fortune, and how far this is removed from wisdom Juvenal declares in these verses: 'You have no divine power, if prudence exists: we make you a goddess, fortune, and we place you in heaven.'¹¹

Folly, therefore, and error, and blindness, and, as Cicero says: 'the ignorance of things and their causes,'¹² has brought on the names of nature and fortune. But as they do not know their adversary, so they do not know virtue even, the knowledge of which descends from the notion of an adversary. If this is joined with wisdom, or, as they say, is itself the same thing as wisdom, then they must not know in what things it is situated. For no one can be fitted with true arms if he does not know the enemy against whom he must be armed, nor can he conquer an adversary who in fighting does not seek a real enemy but a shadow. He will be laid low who, intent upon another, has not seen in advance the blow coming toward him and has not avoided its attack upon his vital organs.

Chapter 30

I have explained as much as my mediocre talents allowed, that the philosophers have long held a path away from the truth. However, I realize how many things I have passed over,

⁹ This is the traditional acceptance of the problem of pain and evil in the world. Cf. St. Thomas *S.T.* I, 48, 49 for the nature of evil and its cause.

¹⁰ Cf. Seneca, *On Providence* 2.4; 2.7; 4.16.

¹¹ Juvenal, 10.365,366.

¹² Cicero, *Posterior Academics* 1.7.29.

since a disputation against the philosophers was not properly my concern. But there had to be a diversion here, that I might show that so many and such great geniuses were wasted in false things, lest someone, perhaps, shut out from the evil religions, might want to go to them, as though he might find something certain there. The one hope of man, therefore, and his one safety, has been put in this doctrine which we are defending, and the whole wisdom of man is in this one thing alone, that he know and worship God. This is our dogma, this our determination. And so with as much voice as I can, I testify to it, I proclaim it, I announce it. Here, here is that which all the philosophers sought in their whole life, and yet were never able to investigate, to comprehend, to hold, because either they retained a depraved religion, or they did away with religion altogether. Let all those depart, therefore, who do not build up human life but disturb it. For what do they teach or whom do they instruct who have not yet instructed themselves? Whom can the sick heal? Whom can the blind lead? Hither, therefore, let us all go to those whose care is wisdom. Shall we wait until Socrates knows something, or until Anaxagoras finds a light in the darkness, or until Democritus extracts the truth from a well, or until Empedocles dilates the paths of his mind, or until Arcesilas and Carneades see, feel, perceive? Lo, a voice from heaven teaching the truth and showing us a light more brilliant than the sun itself! Why are we unjust to ourselves and delay to take up wisdom, which learned men by wasting their years in seeking could never find? He who wishes to be wise and happy, let him hear the voice of God, let him learn justice, let him know the sacrament of his nativity, let him despise human things, let him take up the divine, in order that he may be able to attain that good for which he was born.

When all religious rites have been dissolved, and when all things which were accustomed or were able to be said in their defense have been refuted, then, overcoming the teachings of philosophy, we must come to the true religion and

wisdom. Because the two are joined, as I will show, so that we may assert by arguments or examples or suitable witnesses that that is folly which those worshipers of false gods do not cease to throw up to us, and that we may show that as far as we are concerned it is nothing, just as with them it is all. And although both in the previous books when I was refuting false religions, and in this when I tore down false wisdom, I showed where the truth is, the next book will indicate more clearly, however, what religion is true and what wisdom is the true one.

BOOK FOUR

TRUE WISDOM AND RELIGION

Chapter 1

IT SEEMS TO ME, as I think about it and often reconsider it in my mind, that that former state of the human race is equally strange and unbecoming, because, through the foolishness of one age or generation taking up various religions and believing that there are many gods, man has suddenly come into such great ignorance of himself that when truth was removed from the sight, neither the religion of the true God nor the reason of humanity was held by men seeking their highest good, not in heaven but on earth. And for this reason, of course, the happiness of olden times has been changed. For, abandoning God as the parent and ruler of all things, men began to venerate the insensible products of their own handiwork. What this perverseness accomplished or what evil it brought about the thing itself makes known. For turned away from the highest good which is, therefore, blessed and everlasting, since it is not able to be seen, touched, or grasped, and also from the virtues which are in accord with that good, slipping to these corrupt and fragile gods and desiring those things with which only the body is adorned, nourished, and delighted, they have sought perpetual death for themselves with their gods and bodily goods, because every body is subject to death. There followed upon religions of this sort injustice and impiety, just as was necessary. For they ceased to raise their gaze to the heavens, and as the minds of

men were pressed down by earthly religions, so also did they cling to goods of earth. There followed a severing, a crisis of the human race, and fraud and every crime,¹ because, spurning eternal and incorruptible goods which alone ought to be desired by man, they preferred temporal and short-lived ones, and the greater faith was toward evil for men who preferred the wicked to the upright because it was more present or immediate to them.

Thus mist and darkness seized human life which had been in the clearest light in earlier ages; and, what was fitting to this depravity, after wisdom had been removed, then at length men began to claim for themselves the name of wise men. Then, however, no one was called wise, when everyone was. Would that that name, however, at one time so general, although reduced now in application to a few, retained its force! For those few, perhaps, would be able by their genius or influence or assiduous exhortation to set the people free from vices and errors. But wisdom has so entirely fallen, that from the very arrogance of the name, it appears that no one of those who were called wise was wise.² Yet before this philosophy, which it is said to be, was discovered, there are said to have been seven who, first of all, deserved to be considered and to be named wise men,³ since they dared to make inquiry and to hold discussion about natural things. O miserable and disastrous time in which throughout the whole world there were only seven who were called by the name of men! For no one can rightly be called a man except the one who is wise.

But if all the rest besides those men were fools, then not even were they wise, since no one can be truly wise according to the judgment of fools. Wisdom was to such a degree absent from them that not even afterwards, with the increase of

1 Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.128.

2 Cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 5.3.7.

3 The traditional list of the Seven Sages included: Solon of Athens (c. 638-555 B.C.), Chilo of Sparta (d. 597 B.C.), Thales of Miletus (d. 548 B.C.), Bias of Priene (fl. 6th C. B.C.), Cleobulus of Lindos (d. 564 B.C.), Pittacus of Mitylene (d. 570 B.C.), and Periander of Corinth (d. 858 B.C.).

teaching and many and great geniuses being always intent upon this very pursuit, could truth be perfected and comprehended. For after the glory of those seven wise men, it is incredible with how much zeal for searching out the truth all Greece burned. And as soon as they thought the very name of wisdom arrogant, they called themselves, not wise men, but eager for wisdom. With this move they condemned of error and folly those who rashly ascribed the name of 'the wise' to themselves, and they charged themselves also with ignorance, which, indeed, they did not deny. For whenever the nature of things had stood in the way of their genius, a force as it were, lest they might be able to render some reason, they were accustomed to testify that they knew nothing, that they discerned nothing. Whence there are found much wiser men (who saw that they were not wise in some respect) than those who had believed themselves to be wise.

Chapter 2

So, if those who were called wise were not, and if those later ones were not either, who did not hesitate to admit their non-wisdom, what remains except that wisdom should be sought some place else, since it has not been found where it was sought? What cause may we think that there was why it was not found, though sought by so many geniuses and in so many times and with the greatest zeal and labor, unless it be that the philosophers sought it outside their own territory? Since they never grasped any wisdom, though all areas were plowed over and explored, and it is necessary for it to be somewhere, it is clear that it ought to be sought most surely there where the label of folly appears, under the veil of which God has hidden the treasure of wisdom and truth, lest the secret of His divine work be exposed to public display. For this reason, indeed, I am wont to marvel that, although Pythagoras and

afterwards Plato, inflamed with a love of seeking out the truth, had penetrated as far as the Egyptians and Magians and Persians in order to learn the practices and rites of those nations—for they suspected that wisdom was concerned with religion—did not, however, get to the Jews; and among the Jews only was it found at that time, and they could have gone to them more easily. But I think that they were turned away by divine providence, lest they might be able to know the truth, for it was not yet right for strange men to know the religion of the true God and justice. For God had decided to send a great leader from heaven at the approach of the last age¹ to reveal to outside nations that wisdom taken from a perfidious and ungrateful people.² I will come to the discussion of this in this present book when I shall have first shown that wisdom is so connected with religion that the two cannot be separated.

Chapter 3

The worship of false gods, as I showed in the first book, does not possess wisdom, not only because it lays the 'divine' animal, man, below fragile and earthly things, but because nothing is discussed or carried on there which might be of advantage to cultivating good habits and forming a way of life. Neither does it hold any inquisition of truth, but only the rite of worshipping which consists, not in a function of the mind, but in ministry of the body. Therefore, that is not to be judged true religion because it does not instruct and make people better with any precepts of virtue and justice. So philosophy, since it does not have religion, that is, the greatest piety, is not true wisdom. For if the divinity which governs this world sustains the race of men with incredible beneficence,

¹ The ancients were much concerned with chronological periods and the 'ages' of man. Cf. St. Augustine, *City of God*. The *History* of Orosius (380-418) is a development of this idea also.

² This is also the typical early Christian attitude to the Jews. Later in this book (Chapter 10 ff.) Lactantius treats the matter more fully.

and cherishes it with paternal indulgence, as it were, surely it wants thanks to be rendered and honor given to itself, nor is the reason of piety able to make a stand for man if he comes to be ungrateful for heavenly benefits, which is certainly not the part of a wise man. Since, therefore, as I said, philosophy and the religion of the false gods are disjoined and far separated, inasmuch as there are some professors of wisdom through whom, of course, no approach is made to the gods, and others, overseers of religions through whom wisdom is not learned; it is clear that the one is not true wisdom and the other not true religion. For this reason neither was philosophy able to comprehend truth, nor could the religion of the gods render a reason for itself which it lacked. But where wisdom is joined with religion by an inseparable connection, it is necessary that both be true, because in worshiping we ought to be wise, that is, we ought to know what we ought to worship and how; and in being wise we ought to give worship, that is, to fulfill in actuality what we have come to know.

Where, therefore, is wisdom joined with religion? There, namely, where one God is adored, where life and every act is referred to one head and the Supreme Being, and, finally, the same ones are the doctors of wisdom who are also the priests of God. Let it not, however, disturb anyone, that which has often happened and can take place, that some philosophers undertake the priesthood of the false gods. For when that happens, philosophy is not then joined with religion, but both the philosophy will cease among the sacred things, and the religion, when philosophy will be treated. For that religion is mute, not only because it is of the mute, but because its rite rests upon the hand or in the fingers, not in the heart or tongue, as does ours which is true. Therefore, in wisdom there is religion and in religion wisdom. A separation is not possible, however, because to be wise is nothing else except to honor the true God with just and holy worship. That the worship of many gods is not according to nature can be gathered and grasped even from this argument: every god which is worshiped

by man must be named 'Father' during solemn rites and in prayers, not only because of honor, but also from reason, because he is older than man and because he grants life, health, and living as a father. And so Jupiter is called father by those who pray to him, and so is Saturn, also Janus, and Liber, and the others, too. Lucilius makes fun of this in his council of the gods: 'That there may be no one of us but that he be either the best father of gods; or Father Neptune, Liber, or Saturn is father; Mars, Janus, Quirinus may be father, and the name may be addressed to each one.'¹ But if nature does not allow that there be many fathers of one man—for he is begotten from one—then it is against nature also and against piety to worship many gods. One, therefore, is to be worshiped who can truly be named Father. It is necessary that the same one also be Lord, because just as He can pardon so also He can coerce. He must be called 'Father' because He bestows on us many great gifts, and 'Lord' because He has the greatest power of castigating and punishing. The reason of civil law shows that the same one is lord who is father also. For who will be able to educate his sons unless he has the power of a lord over them? Not undeservedly is he called the father of the family,² although he may have only sons, for certainly the name of father embraces the slaves also, since 'of the family or household' follows, and the name of family or household embraces the children also, since 'father' goes before it. Whence it is clear that the same one is father of the slaves and lord of the children. And finally, a son is sent off (i.e., given in pledge, or marriage, or bond) by the hand, as though a slave, and a freed slave receives the name of the patron, as though he were a son. But if he is named father of the household for this reason, that it might be apparent that he is endowed with a twofold power, since he ought to pardon because he is a

1 Lucilius, *Satires*, Bk. I, frg. 9.

2 This term *pater familias* is a fundamental one in Roman law and social institutions. The Roman 'household' was the unit of society. The orthography is indicative of its ancient use, *familias* being an old genitive form.

father and coerce because he is a lord, therefore, the one who is a slave is a son also, and the same one is both his father and lord.

Just as by the necessity of nature it is not possible that there be any father but one, so neither can there be any lord but the one. For what will the slave do, if many masters give him different commands? Therefore, the religions of many gods are against reason and against nature, for there cannot be many fathers or lords, but it is necessary that gods be called fathers and lords. Truth, therefore, cannot be held where the same man is subjected to many fathers and lords; where the soul, spread into many directions, is torn now here, now there. Neither can religion hold any firmness since it lacks a certain and stable dwelling-place. Therefore, the worshipings of the gods cannot be true in the same way that marriage cannot be said to be true when one woman has many husbands. She will be called either a harlot or an adulteress, for she from whom shame, chastity, and loyalty are absent must also lack virtue. So also the religion of the gods is unchaste and unlawful because it lacks faith, since that unstable and uncertain honor does not have a head and an origin.

Chapter 4

From these things it is clear how wisdom and religion are connected one with the other. Wisdom looks toward children; it exacts love. Religion looks toward slaves; it exacts fear. For just as the former ought to love and honor their father, so the latter should serve and fear their master. Since God, however, who is one, embraces the character both of a father and a master, we ought to love Him because we are His children, and we ought to fear Him because we are His slaves. It is not possible, therefore, for religion to be separated from wisdom or for wisdom to be severed from religion because it is

the same God who ought to be known, which is the part of wisdom, and to be honored, which is the part of religion. But wisdom precedes, religion follows, because to know God is first, to serve Him is consequent. Thus in the two names is the one force, although they seem to be different: one is placed in the understanding and the other in act, but they are similar to two streams flowing from one source. Now the source of wisdom and religion is God; and, if these two streams should wander off from Him, of necessity they dry up and those who do not know Him can be neither wise men nor religious. Thus it happens that the philosophers and those who worship false gods are like either children who have been disowned or fugitive slaves, because they are seeking neither their father nor their master. And just as disowned children do not attain to the inheritance of their father and as fugitives do not gain impunity, so neither will the philosophers receive immortality, which is the inheritance of the celestial kingdom, that is, the highest good which they are especially seeking, nor will those worshipers of the gods escape the penalty of everlasting death, which is the turning away of the true God against those who shun His majesty and name. For neither recognized that God in truth was a Father and at the same time Lord and Master, the worshipers of the false gods just as much as those professors of wisdom, because either they thought that nothing at all should be worshiped or they approved the false religions; or, even if they did recognize the power and might of the supreme God, as Plato did, who said that there was one God, the maker of the world,¹ and also Marcus Tullius, who acknowledges that man is created of a certain exceptional nature by a supreme God,² however, they did not render to Him the worship due as to the supreme Father, which was a necessary consequence.

Now, not only the multitude of them, as I showed above, but even reason declares that the gods cannot be either fathers

1 In *Timaeus* 28 C (cf. Minucius Felix c. 19.14).

2 Cf. Cicero, *The Laws* 1.7.22.

or lords and masters, since it is neither handed down that man was made by these gods nor is it found that the gods themselves antecede the origin of man, inasmuch as it appears that there were men on the earth before Vulcan and Liber (Bacchus) and Apollo and Jupiter himself were born. Besides, the making of man is customarily attributed neither to Saturn nor to his father Caelus (Heaven). But if no one of those who are worshiped is said to have formed and instituted man from the beginning, then no one of these can be called the father of man, and so, not even a god. Therefore, it is not right for them by whom man was not created to be venerated, because neither is it possible for him to be created by those before whom he was himself in existence, nor is it possible for him to be created by many. One, therefore, and only One ought to be adored, who preceded Jupiter, who preceded Saturn, who preceded even heaven and earth itself. It is of necessity that He formed man who, before man was, perfected heaven and earth. He alone must be called Father who created; He alone must be named Lord who rules, who holds the real and everlasting power of life and death. And he who does not adore Him is, on the one hand, a foolish slave who either avoids his Master or who does not know Him, and, on the other, an irreverent son who either hates his true Father or ignores Him.

Chapter 5

Now, since I have explained that wisdom and religion cannot be drawn apart, it remains for us to have a discussion on religion itself and wisdom. I realize, to be sure, how difficult is a discussion on heavenly things, but still it must be dared so that truth may be exposed in all its shining clarity, and that many may be set free from error and destruction, who are spurning it and ejecting it because it now lies hidden under a veil of foolish simplicity. Before I begin to speak of God and

His works, however, I must say a few things about the prophets whose testimonies it is now necessary to make use of, which in the earlier books I tried not to do.¹

He who desires to grasp the truth above all things, ought to devote his attention, not only to an understanding of the words of the prophets, but also to a very diligent study of the times through which each one of them lived, so that he may know both what future they predicted and after how many years their predictions were fulfilled.² There is not any difficulty in collecting these. For they have testified under which ruler each one of them received the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, and many writers have put out books on the times beginning from the prophet Moses, who antedated the Trojan War by about nine hundred years.³ However, when that one had ruled the people for forty years, he had a successor, Josue,⁴ who held the leadership for twenty-seven years. Then they were under the Judges⁵ for three hundred seventy years, and then, after change in organization and condition, they began to have kings. When the kings held power for four hundred fifty years up until the reign of Sedecias,⁶ the Jews, stormed and captured by the Babylonian king,⁷ endured a long-lasting servitude, until in the seventieth year afterwards Cyrus the Elder⁸ returned them to their own land and homes.⁹

¹ Here is the answer given by our author himself to those who have felt an impatience with Lactantius for his neglect to use the strong arguments of Sacred Scripture on many topics discussed heretofore.

² Lactantius again shows forth the historical sense that is such a necessary qualification for a good apologist.

³ We make no apology for Lactantius' acceptance of chronological standards and data since attempts at scientific accuracy in such matters are possible only as the result of centuries of scholarship and modern methods of research.

⁴ Cf. Exod. 17.9-14; Num. 14.6,30; Deut. 3.28, etc.

⁵ Cf. Judges; it contains the history of Israel under the judges who ruled the people before the period of kings.

⁶ Last King of Juda, perished in Babylon. Cf. 4 Kings 24.17; 2 Par. 36.10; Jer. 39.7; 53.11.

⁷ Nabuchodonoser. Cf. 4 Kings 24.12; 1 Par. 6.15; Jer. 39.1; Dan. 1.1.

⁸ King of the Persians and Conqueror of Babylon. Cf. 2 Par. 36.22; 1 Esd. 6.3; Isa. 44.28; 45.1.

⁹ For this digest of Hebrew history cf. Theophilus *Ad Autolyicum* 131 C (139A). Cf. also *A Guide to the Bible*, a translation by McGuire and Arbez of Robert-Tricot *Initiation biblique*, in two volumes, Newman Press, Westminster, Md. 1951-1954, revised edition.

He took up command among the Persians during the same time in which Tarquin the Proud ruled at Rome.¹⁰ So when the whole series of events is collected from the Jewish and Roman histories, even the times of the single prophets can be gathered. The last of these was, of course, Zacharia; it is agreed that he prophesied when Darius was king in the eighth month of the second year of his reign.¹¹ For this reason, then, the prophets are found to be older even than the Greek writers. I put forward all these points so that those may realize their error who strive to label Sacred Scripture as though something new and recently made up, not knowing from what font the origin of our holy religion has flowed forth. But if anyone subjects the foundation of doctrine soundly to the scrutiny of comparing and studying dates and periods, then he will surely and deeply see the truth, and he will lay aside his error upon the recognition of truth.

Chapter 6

God, who is the Fashioner and Establisher of things, as we said in the second book, before He undertook this work of the world, generated the holy and incorruptible spirit which He named His Son.¹ And although He afterwards created innumerable others, whom we call angels, this one alone is His First-begotten Son,² worthy of the appellation of the Divine Name, that is, He possesses the power and majesty of the Father. That there is a Son of the Most High God who is endowed with supreme power, not only the teachings of all the prophets in agreement show, but also the prophecy of

10 Tarquin the Proud is considered as the last king of Rome, expelled by Brutus and Collatinus when the Republic was set up in 509 B.C. Cf. Livy, Book 1.

11 Darius became king of the Persians in 522 B.C. Cf. Theophilus 132D; Zach. 1.1.

1 Lactantius wrote before the formulae of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds became familiar to Christians.

2 Cf. Cyprian, *Testimonies* 2.1.

Trismegistus³ and the oracles and foretellings of the Sibyls. Hermes, in that book which is entitled, *Logos Teleios*, used these words: 'The Lord and Maker of all things whom we rightly call god, since He made a second god, visible and sensible—but I do not say that the same one was sensible from the fact that he himself senses (for concerning this, whether he himself senses or not, will be spoken of at another time) but because he is sent to those sensing and seeing—since therefore he made this one, the first and only and one, he appeared good to him and exceedingly full of all good, he was delighted with him, and loved him perfectly as his own son.'⁴

The Erythraean Sibyl in the beginning of her song, because she starts from the highest god, declares that there is a son of god, a leader and commander of all, with these verses: 'The all-nourishing creator who put the sweet spirit into all things made him the commander-god of all things,'⁵ and again at the end: 'God gave another to honor faithful men.'⁶ Another Sibyl charges that this one ought to be known: 'Know this god who is the son of God.'⁷ Plainly it is the very Son of God who through Solomon, that wisest of kings, spoke those words which follow: 'The Lord set me up as the beginning of his ways in his works; before the world he established me. In the beginning before he made the earth and before he constituted the depths; before the fountains of water sprang forth, and before all the hills, he brought me forth. The lord made the regions and the inhabitable places under the sky. When he prepared the heavens, I was present to him, and when he marked off his abode, when he put strong clouds over

3 Cf. The Pseudo-Augustine, *Against Five Heresies*, in Vol. 8, Appendix of the Maurist Edition of Augustine's works. Hermes, who is called Mercury in Latin, wrote a book called *Logos Teleios*, that is, *The Perfect World*, and there are several statements given describing the word as the only son of God.

4 Hermes. Cf. p. 51a of Patricius' edition; cf. Pseudo-Apuleius *Asclepius* c. 8.

5 Frg. 1.5 f.; cf. also Sedulius, (Montefalconius, *Paleographi graeci* p. 245), 6 *Sibylline Oracles* III.774.

7 VIII.329.

the winds and when he poised the fountains established under the sky, when he balanced the strong foundations of the earth, I was with him arranging things. There I was for whom it was a joy. For I was delighted every day before his face when he rejoiced at the completion of the world.’⁸

For this reason, Trismegistus calls him the ‘world-maker of God’⁹ and the Sibyl the ‘Arranger’ or ‘Planner’¹⁰ because He was endowed with such great wisdom and power by God the Father that He might use this counsel and strength in the making of the world.

Chapter 7

Perhaps someone may ask at this point, who is that one so mighty, so dear to God, and what name does He have whose first beginning not only anteceded the world, but who even arranged it by His wisdom and constructed it by His power. Firstly, it is well for us to know that His name is known, not even by the angels who dwell in heaven, but to Himself alone and to God the Father, nor will it be published, as has been handed down in the sacred writings, before the disposition of God shall have been fulfilled. Then, it is not able to be pronounced by the mouth of man, as Hermes teaches, saying this: ‘Guilty (is he) of this guilt which is the will of the good God, that His name cannot be said by the mouth of men.’¹ And a little afterwards, as to the son: ‘There is, O son, this one unutterable word of wisdom, holy, and before the only Lord of all things, and of the God-ruler of all, to speak which is beyond men.’² But although His name, which the Highest Father bestowed upon Him, from the beginning is

⁸ Cf. Prov. 8.31,32.

⁹ See the fragment given by Lactantius in Book 8.4: *demiourgon tou theou*.

¹⁰ Frg. VIII.264: *Symboulon*.

¹ Cf. Patricius, p. 51a. After the word God in the quotation, the editors before Brandt-Laubmann added *hē theon proenegken*.

² *Ibid*.

known to no one other than Himself, still He has another name among the angels and another with men. He is named Jesus among men. For Christ is not His proper name but the name of power and dominion: this, indeed, the Jews named their kings.

The reason of this name ought to be explained on account of the error of those ignorant people who are accustomed to pronounce it *Chrestus* by the change of a letter. In times past a precept had been given to the Jews that they confect a sacred ointment whereby those who were called to the priesthood or kingship could be anointed; and, just as now for the Romans the garment of purple is a mark of the assumption of royal dignity, so among them the anointing with the sacred ointment conferred the royal name and power.³ But since the ancient Greeks said *chriesthai* for the word which means 'to be anointed,' and which they now say is *aleiphesthai*, as that verse of Homer indicates: 'Now when the maidens had bathed them and anointed (chrīsan) them with olive oil.'⁴ For this reason we call Him Christ, that is, 'the anointed,' which is Messiah in Hebrew. Whence, in certain Greek writings⁵ which have been poorly translated from the Hebrew, *eleimmenos* is found written as from the verb *aleiphesthai* (to be anointed). But by either name king is signified, not because He has gained this earthly kingdom, the time of whose taking has not yet come, but because His kingdom is celestial and everlasting. We will discuss this in the last book.⁶ Now, however, let us speak of His first nativity.

Chapter 8

In the first place we testify that He was born twice; first, in

³ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 7.2.2.

⁴ *Odyssey* 4.49.

⁵ Cf. 1 Kings 2.35; Ps. 83.10; 88.39; Dan. 9.26.

⁶ Bk. 7, c. 20.24.

the spirit, later, in the flesh. Whence, it is said in Jeremia: 'Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee.'¹ And again: 'who was blessed before he was born,'² which happened to no other besides Christ.³ Since He was from the beginning⁴ the Son of God, He was re-generated or born a second time according to the flesh.⁵ This twofold nativity of His has occasioned great error for human minds and has poured darkness around even those who retained the sacraments of the true religion.⁶ But we will show this plainly and very clearly, that the lovers of wisdom may be instructed more easily and more diligently.

He who hears the Son of God spoken of ought not to conceive in his mind such gross wickedness as to think that God (the Father) procreated (Him) from wedlock and union with some woman, which is done only by a corporal animal and one subject to death. Since, however, God was still alone then, with whom could He have united Himself? Or, since He was of such great power that He accomplished whatever He wished, surely He was not in need of the society of another for creating. Unless, perhaps, we think, as Orpheus believed, that God is both male and female, because He could not generate otherwise unless He had the power of both sexes, as though He came together with Himself or without coition He could not have procreated!⁷ But Hermes also was of the same opinion when he called Him 'self-fathered' (*autopatora*) and

¹ Jer. 1.5.

² Cf. Jer. 1.5: 'Before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee.' Lactantius was probably using one of the numerous Old Latin versions of the Bible or even a Greek copy.

³ The meaning is that the eternal blessedness and sanctity of Christ was neither interrupted nor begun by His birth as Man. The statement as made by Lactantius needs commentary, especially in the light of Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception and, likewise, in light of tradition that both John the Baptist and Jeremia were sanctified in the womb.

⁴ Cf. John 1.1.

⁵ Cf. Cyprian's *Testimonies* (p.73.3 in CSEL text) for similar statement on the second birth.

⁶ The great heresies of the early Church (e.g., Arianism, Nestorianism) were concerned with the natures of Christ.

⁷ Cf. frg. 62 (Abel edition); cf. also frg. 123, verse 3.

'self-mothered' (*autometora*).⁸ If this were so, as the Father is spoken of by the prophets, then the mother would be so spoken of. How, then, did He beget? First of all, the divine works can neither be known about nor talked about by anyone. However, the holy writings show, and in these there is surety, that that Son is the word of God, and that the other angels are the spirits (or breathings) of God.⁹ However, since breath and the word are produced from different parts (the breath from the nostrils, the word proceeding from the mouth), there is a great difference between the Son of God and the angels. For the word is breath given forth with the voice signifying something. They went out, the silent breaths of God, because they were created, not for giving forth the knowledge of God, but for ministry. But that One, since He is also spirit, proceeded with voice and sound from the mouth of God as a word, for this purpose, namely, that He would use His voice for the people, that is, that He would be the teacher of the knowledge of God and of bringing the heavenly secret to men. First of all, He spoke Himself (that is, the Word), so that through Him He might speak to us, and that He might reveal to us the voice of God and His will. Rightly, therefore, He is called the speech and Word of God, since God comprehends the vocal spirit proceeding from His mouth which He had conceived, not in the womb, but in the mind by a certain unfathomable strength and power of His majesty into an Image, which has life and power by Its own proper knowledge and wisdom. And likewise He created His other spirits (or breathings) into angels. Our breathings are dissoluble, because we are mortal, but the breaths of God live and remain and perceive, because He Himself is immortal and the giver of life and sensation. Our words may mingle with air and vanish; however, generally they endure when they have been caught in letters or writings. How much more must the word of God be believed to endure unto eternity and to be associated with

⁸ Cf. Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 3.22.56; also Tertullian, *Apology*, c. 21.

⁹ Cf. Ps. 103.4; cf. also Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* c. 7.

sense and power, which He has traduced from God the Father in the manner of a river from its source!¹⁰

But if anyone wonders that God could have been generated from God¹¹ by the giving forth of the word and the breath, if he learns the sacred writings of the prophets, he will cease to wonder. That Solomon and his father, David, were very mighty kings and that these same were prophets is perhaps known to those who have never handled the divine Scriptures. The former of these, who reigned later, antedated the fall of the city of Troy by a hundred forty years.¹² His father, the writer of the divine hymns, speaks thus in Psalm 32: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the power of them by the spirit of His mouth.'¹³ And again in Psalm 44: 'My heart uttered a good word: I speak my works to the king,'¹⁴ attesting herewith that to no other have the works of the Lord been made known except to His Only Son, who is the Word of God and who must reign forever. Solomon, too, shows Him to be the Word of God, by whose hands those works of the world have been fashioned. 'I came out of the mouth of the Most High,' he says, 'the first born before all creatures. I made that in the heavens there should arise light that never faileth, and as a cloud I covered all the earth. I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in a pillar of a cloud.'¹⁵ John also gives it thus: 'In the beginning was the word: and the word was with God: and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were

¹⁰ In this section we note the difficulty of expressing the qualities of God in ordinary language. Lactantius appears to have some grossly anthropomorphic concepts of God. We must remember, however, that at this period Greek, not Latin, was the language of speculation. Not until the birth of Scholasticism did Latin achieve a facility in expressing philosophical and theological speculations.

¹¹ *Ex deo deum*. The phrase has since become commonplace: *Deum de deo*, *lumen de lumine*, etc.

¹² The fall of Troy is now considered to have taken place c. 1184 B.C. The reign of Solomon was from c. 965 to 922 B.C.

¹³ Ps. 32.6.

¹⁴ Ps. 44.2.

¹⁵ Cf. Sir. (Ecclus.) 24.3-5.

made by Him and without Him was made nothing that was made.¹⁶

Chapter 9

But the Greeks have a better way of expressing it with *logos* than we do with *word* or speech. For *logos* signifies both speech and reason,¹ since He is both the voice and the wisdom of God. Not even the philosophers were ignorant of this divine speech, inasmuch as Zeno declares that the Disposer of the nature of things and the Maker of the universe is the word. He calls him *the word spoken*, and the *necessity of things*, and *god*, and the *mind of Jupiter*,² according to that custom, of course, by which they are wont to take Jupiter for God. But the words offer no obstacle when the thought is congruent with truth. For there is the spirit of God, which that one named the mind (or spirit) of Jupiter. Trismegistus, who investigated nearly all truth, I know not how, often described the majesty of the word as that example we gave previously declares, in which he acknowledges that there is a certain 'ineffable and holy word, the speaking of which is beyond the measure of man.'³

I have spoken of this first nativity (of the Son of God) briefly, as much as I was able. Now about the second, since there is controversy about that especially, we must have a fuller discussion, so that we may display the light of understanding to those wishing to know the truth.

¹⁶ John 1.1-3.

¹ Cf. The Pseudo-Augustine for this same notion and almost the same manner of expressing it in *Against Five Heresies* (Benedictine Edition, Vol. 8, Appendix p. 8D).

² Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7.134,135,147; also cf. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* c. 5; *Apologeticum* c. 21.

³ Cf. ch. 7, n. 2.

Chapter 10

In the first place, therefore, men must know that thus from the beginning had the disposition of the Supreme God gone forth, that it would be necessary, as the end of time was approaching,¹ for the Son of God to descend upon the earth in order to erect a temple for God and teach justice; but He was to come, however, not in the strength or heavenly power of an angel, but in the form and mortal condition of man. And when He had performed His magisterial function, He would be delivered into the hands of the wicked and would undergo death, so that when that, too, was conquered by His power, He might rise again, and that to man whom He had put on, whose nature He was wearing,² He might offer the hope of conquering death, and that He might admit him to the rewards of immortality. So that no one may be unaware of this disposition, we will show that all those things which we see fulfilled in Christ were foretold.³ No one need apply credence to our claim or assertion unless I shall have shown that the prophets had predicted that there would be a great series of events to take place before the time when the Son of God should be born as man, and that He would do wonderful things, and spread the worship of God throughout the land, and that He would be at length fastened to a gibbet and rise again on the third day. When I have proved all these things from the writings of those very ones who have denied their God making use of a mortal body, what else will stand in the

1 For a treatment of the ideas of the early Christians on the end of the world see Origen's *De principiis*, Tertullian *De carnis resurrectione*; *De anima*; *Adversus Marcionem*, etc., and St. Augustine *De civitate Dei*, the last 4 books. A summary of the question may be found in Addis-Arnold-Scannell, *A Catholic Dictionary*, London, 1951 *s.v.* 'Last things,' 'Judgment,' etc.

2 This section is typical of the heights reached by early Christian writers in their descriptions of the abasement of the Word made flesh for us.

3 This is one of the traditional *topoi* of the apologists, the evidence of prophecies fulfilled.

way of an admission that is clear, that true wisdom exists in this religion alone?

Now the origin of the whole sacrament⁴ must be related from the beginning. Our ancestors,⁵ who were the leaders of the Hebrews, when they were laboring under barrenness and want, moved into Egypt for grain, and delaying there for too long a while, they were oppressed with the intolerable yoke of slavery. Then God had compassion on them and led them out and liberated them from the hands of the king of the Egyptians after four hundred and thirty years, under the leadership of Moses, through whom the Law was later given to them. In this leading out of bondage God showed the strength of His majesty. For He brought the people across the middle of the Red Sea, His angel going before and separating the water so that the people could walk through dry shod, for whom very truly, as the poet says: 'The curved wave stood around in form like a mountain.'⁶ When this was heard the king of the Egyptians with a great band of his soldiers followed after, and, rashly entering into the sea which was still open, he was destroyed together with all his army as the waters came together.⁷ The Hebrews, however, setting forth into the desert, saw many wonders. For whenever they suffered thirst, a fountain of water burst forth from the rock struck with a blow of the rod, and this refreshed them.⁸ And again, a dew (the manna) of celestial nourishment descended upon them when they were hungry; nay, more, it even came to pass that quails came upon their camp, so that not only with celestial bread but also with more elaborate feastings they

4 The word *Sacramentum* in early Christian Latin had lost the technical significance which it had in Classical Latin. The Fathers gave the name to everything which conveyed one signification to unaided reason and another to faith. Cf. A. Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin*; also J. deGhellinck, 'Pour l'histoire du mot sacramentum,' in *Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense* 3, Paris 1924.

5 I.e., our spiritual or religious ancestors.

6 Vergil, *Georgics* 4.361.

7 Cf. Exod. 14.

8 Cf. Exod. 17.5,6.

might be filled.⁹ Nevertheless, for these divine benefits they did not render honor to God, but now that their slavery had been removed and now that their thirst and hunger had been banished, they fell into luxury and brought their minds back to the profane rites of the Egyptians. For when their leader, Moses, had ascended the mountain and was there for forty days, they fashioned a golden calf's head, which they called Apis,¹⁰ so that it might go before them for a symbol. God was offended against the impious and ungrateful people for this sin and disgraceful deed and afflicted them justly with grave punishment and subjected them to the Law which He had given to Moses.¹¹ Later, when they had settled in a certain part of the desert of Syria, they lost the ancient name of Hebrews, and because the leader of their contest was Judas, they were called Jews and the land which they inhabited Judea.¹² At first, indeed, they were not subjected to the dominion of kings, but civil judges presided over the people and the Law. These were not appointed yearly as were the Roman consuls, however, but they had perpetual jurisdiction. Then, when the name of the Judges was removed, regal power was brought in.¹³ In truth, while the Judges were still holding sway over them, they had often embraced false religions, and because God was offended by them He subjected them often to foreign peoples, until, appeased again by the repentance of the people, He would set them free from their slavery. In like manner under the kings they were harassed by wars with their neighbors on account of their defections. At length, captured and removed to Babylon, they paid the penalty of their impiety with a harsh servitude until Cyrus came into power, who by an edict restored once again the Jews. From then on they had tetrarchs, even up to the time of Herod who was under the command of Tiberius Caesar, in the fifteenth year of

⁹ Cf. Exod. 16.12-16.

¹⁰ The name of an Egyptian calf-god; cf. Isidore, *Origines* 8.11.86.

¹¹ Cf. Exod. 32.

¹² Cf. Mach. 3.

¹³ Cf. 1 Kings 8,9.

whose reign, that is, in the consulship of the two Gemini, on the tenth day before the Kalends of April, the Jews put Christ on the cross. This chronicle of events, this order is contained in the secrets of the holy writings. But first I will show why Christ came upon earth so that the foundation and the plan of our divine religion may be clear.

Chapter 11

Often when the Jews rejected salutary precepts and turned aside from the divine law in their aberrations toward the impious worship of false gods, then God filled with the Holy Spirit just and chosen men, the prophets; and placing them in the midst of the people, He would through them chide the ungrateful people for their sins with threatening words, and He would nonetheless urge them to do penance for their evil. And unless they did this and returned to their God after casting aside their vanities, He would change His testament, that is, the inheritance of eternal life, and He would turn to foreign nations and would gather to Himself another people from among strangers. However, those people, who were admonished by the prophets, not only spurned their words, but, offended that they had rebuked them for their sins, also killed them with exquisite tortures. Of all these things the sacred books keep account. For the prophet Jeremia says: 'I have sent to you my servants, the prophets. I sent them before light and you hearkened not to me, nor inclined your ears to hear. When I said to you: Return ye, every one from his evil way, and from your wicked devices, and you shall dwell in that land, which I have given to you and to your fathers forever and ever. Do not go after strange gods to serve them, and do not provoke me to wrath by the works of your hands for afflicting you.'¹

¹ Jer. 25.4-6.

The prophet Esdras, also, who lived in the times of that same Cyrus by whom the Jews were restored spoke thus: 'They departed from thee and threw thy law behind their backs. And they killed thy prophets who admonished them to return to thee.'² And in the same strain we hear Elias in the third Book of Kings: 'With zeal I have been zealous for the Lord God Almighty; for the children of Israel have forsaken thee. They have thrown down thy altars, they have slain thy prophets with the sword: and I alone am left and they seek my life to take it away.'³ On account of these impieties of that people, He turned away from them forever, and ceased to send the prophets to them. But His only begotten Son, that Maker of things, and His Counselor,⁴ He ordered to come down from heaven that He might transfer the holy religion of God to the nations, that is, to those who knew not God, and teach them the justice which the perfidious people had cast aside.

He had already, indeed, declared that He would do that as the prophet Malachia makes clear when he says: 'I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord, and I will not receive a gift from your hands. For from the rising of the sun even to the going down, my name will be great among the Gentiles.'⁵ David also in the Psalm 17 declares: 'Thou wilt make me the head of the Gentiles: A people which I know not shall serve me.'⁶ And Isaia speaks thus: 'I come that I may gather together all nations and tongues, and they shall come and shall see my glory. And I will send down a sign upon them and I will send of them that shall be saved to the Gentiles afar off, to those that have not heard of my glory. And they shall declare my glory to the Gentiles.'⁷

God, however, wishing to send the 'measurer of His temple'⁸ upon the earth, did not wish to send Him in the power and

² 2 Esd. 9.26.

³ 3 Kings 19.10.

⁴ Cf. the *Sibylline Fragments* 8.264; also Isa. 9.6; 11.2; 40.13.

⁵ Mal. 1.10 f.

⁶ Cf. Ps. 17.44 f.

⁷ Isa. 66.18 f.

⁸ Cf. Ezech. 40.

brightness of heaven, so that people ungrateful to God might be led into great error and pay the penalty for their crimes, those who had not received the Lord and their God, which the prophets had once foretold would thus take place. For Isaia, whom the Jews themselves killed most cruelly with a saw, said this: 'Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have brought up children and have exalted them, but they have despised me. The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib: but Israel hath not known me and my people hath not understood me.'⁹ And Jeremia also speaks in a similar manner: 'The turtle-dove hath known her time and the swallow, and the sparrows of the country side have observed the times of their coming, but my people have not known the judgment of the Lord. How do you say: We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Indeed, the lying pen of the scribe has wrought falsehood. The wise men are confounded; they are dismayed and taken, for they have cast away the word of the Lord.'¹⁰

Therefore, as I had begun to say, when God had decided to send the Teacher of Virtue to men, He enjoined that He be born again, this time in flesh, and that He become like to man himself, for whom He would be the Leader and Companion and Master. Nevertheless, since God is clement and loving toward His children, He sent Him to those very ones with whom He was displeased, lest He close against them forever the way of salvation, and that He might give them the free opportunity of following God, so that they might gain the reward of life if they followed (which many of them are doing and have done), and that they might incur this punishment of death through their own fault if they rejected their king. Among that people, therefore, and of their stock He ordered Him to be born, lest, if He had come of a foreign race, they could hold out a just excuse concerning the law for the reason that they had not received Him; and at the same time, that

⁹ Isa. 1.2-4.

¹⁰ Jer. 8.7-9.

there might be no people whatsoever upon the earth to whom the hope of immortality would be denied.

Chapter 12

And so, that Holy Spirit of God coming down from heaven chose the holy virgin by means of whose womb He would make His way among us. She, filled completely with the divine Spirit, conceived Him, and without any contact with a man, her virginal womb was suddenly fruitful. Now if it is known to all that certain animals are wont to conceive 'by the wind and air,'¹ why should anyone think it strange when we say that the Virgin was made pregnant by the Spirit of God to whom whatever He wishes is easy? But surely this could seem incredible, except that the prophets had declared many ages before that it would take place. Solomon in the Psalm 19 says: 'The womb of a virgin is impaired and has received a child; and the virgin has become pregnant and she is become a mother in much misery.'² Likewise the prophet Isaia, whose words are these: 'Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Emmanuel.'³

What can be more plainly said than this? The Jews who killed Him read those very words. If anyone thinks that we are making them up, let him ask them. They may take the strongest proof from them. It is firm enough testimony for proving the truth because it is presented by those who are our enemies. He has not been called Emmanuel habitually, however, but Jesus, which in Latin means salvation or Savior, because He came as the bearer of salvation to all peoples.⁴ But the prophet declared by this name that God would come to men in flesh.

¹ Cf. Vergil, *Georgics* 3.274.

² This place has not been found in the apocryphal *Psalms of Solomon* which are extant.

³ Isa. 7.14.

⁴ Cf. St. Augustine, *City of God* 17.18; Isidore, *Origines* 7.2; 7; 10.

For Emmanuel means 'God with us,' and since that one has been born of a virgin, men must confess that God is with them, that is, in the world and in mortal flesh. Whence David in Psalm 84 says: 'Truth has sprung out of the earth,'⁵ because God, in whom is truth, took an earthly body in order that He might open the way of salvation to earthlings. Isaia himself says: 'They however did not believe, and they provoked to wrath the Holy Spirit, and he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them and he remembered the days of old, who raised the shepherd of his flock from the earth.'⁶ Who that shepherd would be he declared in another place, when he said: 'Let the heavens exult from above, and let the clouds rain the just. Let the earth be opened and bud forth a savior. I the Lord have created him.'⁷ But the Savior is, as we said above, Jesus. In still another place the same prophet spoke thus: 'For, lo, a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is upon his shoulders, and his name has been called the angel of great counsel.'⁸

For this reason, therefore, He was sent by God the Father that He might reveal to all peoples which are under heaven the holy mystery of the single and true God, which was taken away from that perfidious people who by turning away often abandoned God. Daniel also made similar pronouncements: 'I beheld in the vision of the night,' he says, 'and lo, one like the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. And he came even to the Ancient of Days. And those who stood near presented him. And there was given to him power and glory and a kingdom: and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve him. And his power is an everlasting power which shall never pass away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed.'⁹ How, then, do the Jews both confess the Christ of God and hope for Him who have rejected Him for this reason, that He was

⁵ Ps. 84.12.

⁶ Isa. 63.10 f.

⁷ Isa. 45.8.

⁸ Isa. 9.6.

⁹ Dan. 7.13,14.

born of man? For since it has been thus determined by God that the same Christ should come upon the earth twice—once, to announce the one God to all peoples, and then again to reign—how do they believe in His second coming who have not believed in the first? The prophet, though, has embraced both of His comings in these few words: ‘Lo,’ he said, ‘one like the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven.’ He did not say ‘as the Son of God,’ but ‘as the Son of Man’ so that he might show that which He would have clothed with flesh on earth, that with the assumed form of man and his mortal condition He might teach men justice. And, when performing the charges of God He had revealed truth to the peoples. He would suffer even death, to conquer hell also and to return, and so at length rising again and lifted up on high, to go back to His Father in heaven. For the prophet had made this additional note and said: ‘And he came even up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.’ He called the Supreme God the Ancient of Days, the age and origin of whom cannot be comprehended, since He has existed alone from all eternity, as He will be always unto ages and ages. That Christ would ascend to God the Father after His Passion and Resurrection David testified in Psalm 109 in these words: ‘The Lord said to my Lord: sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thy enemies the footstool for Thy feet.’¹⁰ Since this prophet was king, whom could he call his lord who was to sit at the right hand of God except Christ, the Son of God, who is the ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’?¹¹

Isaia put this more clearly saying: ‘Thus saith the Lord God to my anointed (Christ) lord, whose right hand I have taken hold of, to subdue nations before him, and I will break the might of kings. I will open before him the doors and the gates of cities shall not be shut. I will go before thee and will level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of iron and will burst the bars of iron. And I will give thee hidden

¹⁰ Ps. 109.1.

¹¹ Cf. St. Paul; 1 Tim. 6.15.

treasures and concealed riches, that you may know that I am the Lord God who calls thee by thy name.’¹² Finally, on account of the virtue and faith which he presented to God on earth: ‘There was given him honor and power and a kingdom, and all peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve him. And his power is everlasting which shall not be taken away, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed.’¹³ This, indeed, is understood in two ways. He has even now everlasting power since all nations and all tongues venerate His name, confess His majesty, follow His teaching, imitate His virtue; He has kingdom and glory since all tribes of the earth obey His precepts. And afterwards, when He shall come again in power and glory to judge each soul and restore the just to life, then truly, He will hold the dominion of the whole earth. Then, when all evil has been removed from human affairs, will that golden age, as the poets call it, arise, that is, that just and peaceful time. But we shall discuss this more fully in the last book¹⁴ when we speak of the second coming. Now let us explain about the first as we have begun.

Chapter 13

The Supreme God and Parent of all, then, when He wished to transfer His religious worship, sent from heaven the Teacher of justice, so that by new practices He might give a new law in Him or through Him, not as He had done before through a man; yet He wished Him to be born as though a man, however, that He might live through all details like to the Father Almighty. For God the Father Himself, the Origin and Principle of all things, since He is without parents, is very truly named ‘The Unfathered’ (*ἀπάτωρ*) and ‘The Unmothered’ (*ἀμήτωρ*) by Trismegistus, because He has beginning from no

¹² Isa. 45.1-3.

¹³ Dan. 7.14.

¹⁴ Cf. Bk. 7, ch. 20.

one. Therefore, it was necessary for the Son to be born twice that He too might be 'Unfathered' and 'Unmothered.' For in the first spiritual nativity He was without a mother (*ἀμήτωρ*), since He was begotten by God the Father alone without the function of a mother. In the second, that according to the flesh, He was without a father (*ἀπῆτωρ*), since He was formed in a virginal womb without the function of a father, so that bearing a substance midway between God and man He could carry up this weak and fragile nature of ours in His hand, as it were, to immortality. He became both Son of God through the spirit and Son of Man through the flesh, that is, He is both God and man. The power of God appeared in Him from the works which He performed; the weakness of man from the passion which He endured. Why He underwent this I will show a little later. Meanwhile, that He was both God and man, a person in whom the two natures are united, we learn from the exhortations of the prophets.

Isaia testifies that He was God with these words: 'The labor of Egypt and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and of Sabaim men of stature shall come over to thee and shall be thy servants. They shall walk after thee, they shall go bound with manacles. And they shall worship thee and make supplication to thee: only in thee is God; and there is no god besides thee. For thou art God, and we did not know thee, the God of Israel, the Savior. They shall be confounded and put to shame, all who are opposed to thee, and they shall fall into acknowledgment.'¹

Likewise did the prophet Jeremia speak thus: 'This is our God and there shall be no other accounted of in comparison of Him. He found out all the way of knowledge and gave it to Jacob His servant and to Israel His beloved. Afterwards He was seen upon earth and conversed with men.'² And David in Psalm 44: 'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: the

¹ Isa. 45.14-16. The Brandt-Laubmann text provides *confessionem* here for the Vulgate *confusionem* which is also in *PL*.

² Bar. 3.36-38. Baruch was Jeremia's secretary and disciple, and the ancient fathers considered his work as part of the prophecy of Jeremia.

scepter of Thy Kingdom is a scepter of uprightness. Thou hast loved justice, Thou hast hated injustice. Therefore the Lord Thy God has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness.³ With this word He even showed His name, since, as I have explained above,⁴ He was called 'Christ' from the anointing. Then, that the same one was man Jeremia shows, saying: 'And he is man, and who has known him?'⁵ And Isaia: 'And the Lord shall send them a man, who shall save them, and judging them he will heal them.'⁶ Moses, too, in Numbers speaks thus: 'A star shall rise out of Jacob and a man (*scepter* in the Vulgate) shall spring up from Israel.'⁷

For this reason when the Milesian Apollo was consulted as to whether he were a god or man, the response was in this wise: 'Mortal according to the flesh, wise in portent-bearing works, but convicted by Chaldean judges, doomed to endure a bitter end. . . .'⁸

In the first verse, indeed, he spoke the truth, but he subtly deceived his consultor who was thoroughly ignorant of the security of truth, for he seems to have denied that that one was a god. But when he confesses to have been mortal according to the flesh, which we also declare, the consequence is that according to the spirit he was a god, which we affirm. Why had it been necessary to make mention of the flesh when it was enough to say that he was mortal? But, pressed by truth, he could not deny how the matter stood, just as in the case of that statement which made him wise. What do you answer to this, Apollo? If he was wise, then his doctrine is wisdom and nothing else, and those who follow it are none other than the wise. Why, then, are we taken by the crowd for fools and empty, witless men who follow a Master who is wise by the confession of their own gods? For because he said that that

³ Ps. 44.7,8.

⁴ Ch. 7.

⁵ Jer. 17.9.

⁶ Isa. 19.20.

⁷ Num. 24.17.

⁸ Cf. Sedulius, (*Montefalconius, Palaeographi graeci*, p. 245); G. Wolff, *On the Philosophy of Porphyrius*, 184.

one had performed portentous works whereby he merited especially the faith of divinity, he seems now to agree with us since he says the same things in which we glory. Then he gathers himself together and returns to demoniac deceits. For when he had spoken the truth of necessity, he seemed, then, a betrayer of the gods and of himself, if he had not obscured what truth had expressed by him with the deceit of a lie. Therefore, he says that that one performed marvelous works, indeed, but not by divine power but by magic. Why is it strange, since Apollo persuaded this as truth to the ignorant, when the Jews also, worshipers as they seemed of the supreme God, thought this same thing, when before their eyes those marvels were daily performed? But they could not have been impelled, however, by the contemplation of such great powers to believe him a god whom they saw. For this reason, David, whom before all others they read especially, thus condemns them in Psalm 27: 'Render to them for their deeds, because they have not understood the works of the Lord.'⁹

Both David himself and the other prophets announced that Christ would be generated according to the flesh from the house of this very David. In Isaia it is written thus: 'And there shall come to pass in that day the root of Jesse and he who shall rise up to be lorded among the peoples. In him the gentiles shall hope and his rest shall be in honor.'¹⁰ And in another place: 'And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord shall fill him.'¹¹

Now Jesse was the father of David, from whose root he foretold that a flower would spring, that one, namely, of whom the Sibyl said: 'A fair flower shall rise up.'¹²

⁹ Ps. 27.4 f.

¹⁰ Isa. 11.10.

¹¹ Isa. 11.1-3.

¹² Frig. 6.8.

Likewise, in the second Book of Kings, the prophet Nathan was sent to David who was desirous of building a temple to God. 'And it came to pass that the word of the Lord came to Nathan saying: Go and say to my servant David: Thus saith the Lord God Almighty: Thou shalt not build me a house to dwell in, but when thy days shall be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will raise up thy seed after thee, and I will prepare his kingdom. He shall build a house for me in my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son. And his house shall be faithful and his kingdom shall be forever.'¹³

But that the Jews might not understand these words, that was the reason that Solomon, David's son, built the temple to God and the city which he named Jerusalem after himself. So they referred to him the things which had been said by the prophet. Solomon, however, received the power of command from his father himself. The prophets, however, were speaking of him who was then to be born after David had gone to rest with his fathers. Besides, the command of Solomon was not perpetual, for he reigned forty years. Then, because he is never called the Son of God but the son of David, and because the house which he built was not faithful (i.e., did not attain unto faith), as the Church which is the true temple of God, since it does not consist in walls but in the hearts and faithfulness of the men who believe in Him and are called the faithful, that temple of Solomon's, therefore, since it was made with hands, fell to hands. Finally, his father in Psalm 126 prophesied in this manner concerning the works of his son: 'If the Lord does not build the house, they have labored in vain who have built it. And unless the Lord guard the city, in vain hath the guard kept vigil.'¹⁴

¹³ 2 Kings 7.4,5; 12-14; 16.

¹⁴ Ps. 126.1.

Chapter 14

From these things it is clear that all the prophets made foretellings about Christ, that he would be born someday of the line of David according to the flesh and establish an eternal temple unto God, which is called the Church, and that He would call all peoples to the true religion of God. This is the faithful house, this the immortal temple, in which anyone who does not sacrifice will not have the reward of immortality. Since Christ was the maker of this great and everlasting temple, it must be that the same have within it an everlasting priesthood, nor can there be any coming to the entrance of the temple and to the sight of God except through Him who established the temple.

David shows this same truth in Psalm 109 saying: 'Before the daystar I begot thee. The Lord has sworn and he will not repent: Thou art a priest forever.'¹ And in the first Book of Kings we read: 'And I will raise me up a faithful priest, who shall do all things according to my heart, and I will build him a faithful house; and he shall walk in my sight all days.'²

Now who this one would be to whom God promised an eternal priesthood Zacharia has taught, even giving his name most clearly. For thus he spoke: 'And the Lord God showed me Jesus the high priest standing before the face of the angel of the Lord, and the devil stood at his right hand to be his adversary. And the Lord said to the devil: May the Lord that chose Jerusalem rule over thee, and behold the brand plucked out of the fire! And Jesus was clothed with filthy garments: and he stood before the face of the angel. And he answered and said to them that stood around before his face, saying: Take away the filthy garments from him, and put on him a tunic and sandals, and put a clean mitre upon his head. And they clothed him with garments and put a clean mitre upon his head. And the angel of the Lord stood and testified

¹ Cf. Ps. 109.3 f.

² Cf. 1 Kings 2.35.

before Jesus, saying: Thus saith the Lord Almighty: if thou wilt walk in my ways and keep my charges, thou shalt judge my house. And I will give thee some of them that are now present to walk with thee. Hear, then, O Jesus, thou high priest.³

Therefore, who would not believe that the Jews, then, were captives in their minds who, when they read these prophecies and heard them, inflicted criminal hands upon their God? But from that time in which Zacharia lived until the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Christ was crucified, almost five hundred years are numbered, inasmuch as he grew up in the age of Darius and Alexander, who lived not long after Tarquin the Proud was expelled. But they are again false and deceived in the same manner thinking that these things were spoken of concerning Jesus, the son of Nave (Nun), who was the successor of Moses, or about the priesthood of Jesus, the son of Josedech; but nothing of those things which the prophet told fits these. For they were never in filthy clothing, since one of them was a most powerful prince and the other a priest; nor did they ever suffer adversity that they should be thought of as a brand snatched from the fire; nor did they ever stand in the presence of God and the angels, or else the prophet was speaking of past events rather than of future ones.

He spoke, therefore, of Jesus, the Son of God, in order to show that He would come first in humility and in the flesh. For this is the sordid vestment so that He might prepare a temple for God, and as a brand that He might be burned with fire, that is, He endured the tortures from men and was extinguished at last. For they commonly call a brand a rod which has been extracted from the hearth, half-burned and extinguished. But in what way and with what commands He was sent by God upon the earth, the spirit of God declared, speaking through the prophet, what would take place, so that when He had fulfilled the will of the Almighty Father faith-

³ Cf. Zach. 3.1-8.

fully and constantly, He received judgment and everlasting power. 'If you walk in my ways,' He said, 'and keep my charges, you will judge my house.'⁴

What these ways of God were and what His precepts were is neither doubtful nor obscure. For when God saw that malice and the worship of false gods had become so strong throughout the world that His name had been almost removed from the memory of men—inasmuch as the Jews also, to whom alone the secret of God had been entrusted, abandoning the living God, had gone astray to the worship of idols, being ensnared by the deceits of the devils, nor were they willing to return to God at the instigation of the prophets—He appointed His Son, the Prince of Angels, for men, to convert them from impious and vain cults to a knowledge and worship of the true God, and also to draw their minds from folly to wisdom, from iniquity to works of justice. These are the ways of God in which He charged Him to walk; these are the precepts which He commanded to be kept. That One, indeed, put faith in God: He taught that God is one and that He alone ought to be adored, nor did He ever call Himself God, because He would not have kept faith, if, sent to remove false gods and make claim for the one, He should bring in another besides that One.⁵ This was not to perform the heralding of the one God and not of Him who had sent Him, but it was doing His own proper work and the separating of Himself (as a person) from Him whom He had come to make manifest. On this account, because He is so faithful, because He assumed nothing unto Himself outrightly, in order to fulfill the commands of His Sender, He has received both the dignity of a perpetual priesthood and the honor of the Supreme King and the power of the Judge and the Name of God.

⁴ Cf. Zach. 3.7.

⁵ The Hebrews of old were not capable of explicit and detailed teachings on the Trinity, and this passage shows us that Lactantius has not an accurate grasp of this sublime dogma. His efforts, strained as they are, at conscientious explanation, however, are laudable.

Chapter 15

Since we have spoken of His second nativity by which He showed Himself to men in the flesh, let us come now to those wondrous works which, because they were indices of celestial power, the Jews thought were the works of magic. As soon as He began manhood, He was baptized in the river Jordan by the prophet John, that by this spiritual washing He might put aside, not His sins, which He certainly did not have, but sins of the flesh or human nature which He was bearing; so that, just as He saved the Jews by their undergoing of circumcision, thus also He might save the Gentiles through baptism, that is, through the pouring of the purifying dew. Then a voice was heard from heaven: 'Thou art My beloved son, this day have I begotten thee.'¹ This word is found predicted in David. And there descended upon Him the Spirit of God formed in the likeness of a white dove.²

From then on He began to work the greatest powers, not through the trickery of magic, which shows nothing true and solid, but by the strength and power of heaven. And these works were long since declared by the announcements of the prophets. They are so many that one book would not be enough to include the accounts of them all. I will list them briefly, therefore, and according to their type without any designation of persons or places, so that I may arrive at the point of recounting His Passion and cross, toward which this account has been hurrying now for a long time. His were powers which Apollo called 'portent-bearing,'³ because wherever He made His way, the sick and weak and those laboring under every kind of infirmity He made whole in a moment and with a word, so much so that those who were taken, all their members afflicted, suddenly invigorated with new

¹ Cf. Luke 3.23; Ps. 2.7. This union of the quotations is not unique.

² Luke mentions the dove. The idea of the 'white dove' Lactantius may have taken from the *Sibylline Oracle*, VI.7.

³ Cf. ch. 13, n. 8.

strength, would themselves carry back the stretchers on which they had been borne to Him a little while before.⁴

To those who were lame and afflicted with disease of the feet, He gave the faculty, not only of walking, but even of running. Those whose blinded eyes kept them in deepest darkness He restored to their pristine vision. The tongues of the dumb also He loosed unto speech and eloquence. Likewise, He opened the ears of the deaf and breathed hearing into them; those polluted and covered with sores He cleansed.⁵ And He did all these things, not with His hands or with some charm, but by a word and a command, just as the Sibyl had foretold: 'Doing all things with a word and healing all sickness.'⁶ Certainly, it is not strange that He did marvelous works with a word, since He Himself was the word of God sustained with the power and virtue of heaven. Nor was it enough that He gave strength to the weak, soundness to the debilitated, health to the sick and infirm, unless He also raised the dead and recalled them to life, just as though they had been released from sleep. Seeing these things, the Jews then claimed that they were performed by demoniacal power, although their secret writings contained all these things that would be done as though they were done. For they read surely both the words of the other prophets and also those of Isaia, saying: 'Be strengthened, ye feeble hands, and be consoled, weak knees. You who are faint-hearted, do not fear, do not be afraid. Our God will bring judgment; He Himself will come and save us. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf shall hear. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free. For waters are broken out in the desert and streams in the wilderness.'⁷ But the Sibyl chanted the same things in these verses: "There will be the raising up of the dead and a swifter running of the lame, and

⁴ Cf. Matt. 9.6.

⁵ Cf. Isa. 35.5,6.

⁶ VIII.272. Cf. Montefalconius, *Palaeographi graeci*, p. 245.

⁷ Cf. Isa. 35.3-6.

the deaf will hear, and the blind will see, and those without speech will talk.'⁸

When a great multitude followed Him on account of these powers and His divine works, a multitude of sick or weak or of those who wished to present their ailments to be cured, He went up into a certain deserted mountain place to worship there. When He had stayed for three days and because the people were suffering hunger, He called His disciples and asked them how many loaves they were carrying with them. They said that they had five loaves and two fishes in a basket. He ordered them brought to Him and had the multitude recline after having been arranged in groups of fifty. While His disciples were doing this, He broke the bread and the meat of the fishes into small pieces, and both foods were increased in His hands. And when He had ordered His disciples to place it before the people, five thousand men were filled, and besides, twelve baskets were filled with the fragments that remained.⁹ What more marvelous can be said or done? But the Sibyl had once foretold that such would be. Verses such as these are related by her: 'From five loaves of bread and some fishes of the sea he will fill five thousand men in the desert, and taking up all the fragments left around, he will fill twelve baskets in the hope of the people.'¹⁰ I ask, therefore, what magic art could accomplish here the skill which has no other power than that of circumventing the eyes, that is, causing an illusion.

When He was about to go apart into the mountain to pray, as was His wont, He charged His disciples to take the boat and to go before Him. And as evening approached, they began to struggle, being carried by an unfavorable wind. And now when they were holding their course in the middle of the sea, He, walking upon the water, followed them, just as though He were stepping on the ground,¹¹ not as the poets deceitfully

⁸ VIII.205-207.

⁹ Cf. Matt. 14.13 ff.

¹⁰ VIII.275-277.

¹¹ Cf. Matt. 14.22 ff.

tell us that Orion walks upon the sea who, though part of his body is submerged, 'overtops the waves with his shoulders.'¹²

Again, when He had gone to sleep in the boat, and the wind had begun to rage to the point of extreme danger, awakened from sleep He straightway ordered the wind to be silent and the waves which were being borne very high to be still. And immediately at His word there followed a calm.¹³ Perhaps the holy writings lie when they teach that such great power was in Him, that He compelled the winds to obey His command, the seas to serve, sicknesses to depart, and the powers of hell to comply. What of the fact that the Sibyls taught the same things in their chants long before? One of these, mention of whom we made above,¹⁴ speaks thus: 'The winds he will stop with a word; he will smooth the maddened sea and entrust it with an abiding peace.'¹⁵ And again, there is another Sibyl who says: 'He will travel the waves; he will put a stop to sicknesses of men; he will raise the dead; he will drive away much pain; from one penny worth of bread, a band of men will be fed.'¹⁶ Convinced by these testimonies certain men are accustomed to take refuge with this argument: they say that those are not Sibylline chants, but that they were fashioned and arranged by our own people. But certainly one will not think this who has read Cicero¹⁷ and Varro¹⁸ and the other ancient writers who make mention of the Erythraean Sibyl and the others from whose books we drew those examples. These authors died before Christ was born according to the flesh. But I do not doubt that those chants were regarded in former times as the ravings of delirium, since no one understood them. For they denounced certain monstrous and remarkable happenings of which neither

¹² Vergil, *Aeneid* 10.764.

¹³ Cf. Matt. 8.23 ff.

¹⁴ Cf. n. 8.

¹⁵ VIII.273,274.

¹⁶ VI.13-15.

¹⁷ Cf. *On Divination* 1.18.34.

¹⁸ Cf. Book I.6. Cf. also Jerome, *Against Jovinian* I.306D; St. Augustine, *City of God* 18.23.

the plan nor the time nor the author was designated. In conclusion, Erythraea said that she would be called insane and a liar. Note these verses: 'They will say that the Sibyl is lying, deceitful. When all things shall come to pass, then no one shall make mention of me and no one will say that I lie, the prophetess of the great God.'¹⁹ They have lain as secrets for many ages, but they were noticed after the Nativity of Christ and His Passion made clear their secret meaning, as did the words of the prophets also. Since these things had been read for a thousand five hundred years and more, but were not understood until after Christ had interpreted them by His words and works—for the prophets had announced Him—neither could those things which they spoke be understood in any way, unless they had all been fulfilled.

Chapter 16

I come now to the Passion itself which is ordinarily presented to us as an opprobrium, because we revere Him also as man and a man afflicted with extreme punishment and tortured by men, so that I may show that that very Passion had been so undergone with His great divine purpose, and that in it alone are contained virtue and truth and wisdom. For if He had been most happy upon the earth and had reigned throughout His whole life in supreme felicity, not any wise man would have believed Him God or judged Him worthy of divine honor. Those devoid of true divinity do this. They not only look up to transitory riches and frail power and the goods of an alien benefice, but they even consecrate them. With full knowledge they serve the memory of the dead, cultivating a fortune already extinct, which the wise have ever thought should not be cultivated by them even if it were living and present. For not anything in earthly matters can be

¹⁹ III.814 ff.

venerable and worthy of heaven, but it is virtue alone, justice alone, which can be judged a true good, both heavenly and perpetual, since it is neither given to anyone or taken away.¹ Since Christ came upon the earth endowed with this virtue and justice; rather, in fact, since He is Himself virtue and since He is Himself justice, He came down in order to teach it and instruct men. Performing this magisterium and ambassadorship of God on account of that same virtue which He both taught and made at the same time, He merited to be and could be believed God by all peoples. Therefore, when a great number of the people surged toward Him in eagerness, because of the justice which He taught or the miracles which He performed, and when they heard His instructions and believed that He was sent by God and was the Son of God, then the leaders of the Jews and their priests, goaded by anger because they were charged by Him as though they were sinners, and depraved by envy because they saw themselves contemned and deserted as the multitude swayed toward Him, and (and this was the source of their crime!) blinded by foolishness and error, and unmindful of the heavenly precepts and the prophets, they banded together against Him and formed an impious plan for taking Him and crucifying Him. Long before the prophets had described this. For David, in the beginning of his Psalms, foreseeing in spirit how great a crime they were going to adopt, said: 'Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly.'² And Solomon in the Book of Wisdom used these words: 'Let us therefore lie in wait for the just because he is not sweet to us and upbraideth us with transgressions of the law. He boasteth that he hath the knowledge of God and calleth himself the son of God. He has become unto us a censurer of our thoughts. He is grievous unto us, even to behold, for his life is not like other men's, and his ways are very different. We are esteemed by him as triflers: and he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness, and he

¹ Cf. Sallust, *Jugurtha* 1.3.

² Cf. Ps. 1.1.

preferreth the latter end of the just, and glorieth that he hath God for his father. Let us see, then, if his words be true, and let us prove what shall happen to him. Let us examine him by outrages and tortures that we may know his meekness and try his patience. Let us condemn him to a most shameful death. These things they thought and were deceived: for their own malice blinded them, and they knew not the secrets of God.³

Did he not so describe that nefarious plan entered into by the ungodly against God that he would seem to have been there? But from Solomon, who said this, until that time at which the events took place, one thousand and ten years passed. We make up nothing. We add nothing. Those who did these things had the books. Those against whom these things were spoken read them. But now the heirs also of their name and crime have them. And in their daily readings they sound forth their own damnation predicted by the words of the prophets, nor do they ever admit into their hearts what this very part is of their damnation. The Jews, therefore, charged by Christ who often reproved them for their sins and injustice, and almost deserted by the people, were aroused to kill Him. His humility gave them the daring for this crime. For when they read with what great majesty and brightness the Son of God would come from heaven, and they beheld Jesus lowly, poor, and unsightly, they did not believe Him to be the Son of God. They were not aware that His two comings had been spoken of by the prophets: the first, obscure in the humility of the flesh; the second, manifested in the power of majesty. Of the first David speaks thus in the seventy-first psalm: 'He shall come down like rain upon the fleece, and in his days shall justice spring up and abundance of peace, till the moon be taken away.'⁴ For just as the rain, if it descends upon fleece, cannot be noticed because it does not make a noise, so he said that Christ would come upon the earth

³ Cf. Wisd. 2.12-17; 19-22.

⁴ Cf. Ps. 71.6,7.

without anyone's suspecting it, so that He might teach justice and peace.

Isaia also gave it forth in this manner: 'O Lord, who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? We have spoken in his presence as of a child, and as a root in thirsty ground. There was no beauty in him nor comeliness and we have seen him, and he had no sightliness nor grace, but his look was without honor and lacking beyond the rest of men. A man placed in a trap and knowing how to bear weakness, because he was turned aside and was not reckoned. This one bears our sins and grieves for us, and we have thought him to be in pain and a snare and in vexation. But he was wounded for our iniquities and he was bruised for our sins. The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, and God has handed him over for our sins.'⁵

And the Sibyl in the same strain: 'Pitiable, without honor, unsightly, in order to give hope to the pitiable.'⁶ On account of this lowliness, they did not recognize their God and entered upon a detestable plan to deprive of life Him who had come to give them life.

Chapter 17

Of the wrath and ill-will which they bore enclosed in their hearts, they put forward other causes: that He was breaking the law of God given through Moses, that is, He did not abstain on the Sabbath from working for the salvation of men; or that He made circumcision as of no account; or that He did away with abstinence from the meat of swine. The sacraments of the Jewish religion consist in these things. On account of these things, then, the other part of the people, which had not yet gone over to Christ, was incited by the priests to judge Him as wicked because He broke the law of God, al-

⁵ Cf. Isa. 53.1-6.

⁶ VIII.257.

though He was doing this, not according to His own determination, but by the will of God, and according to the predictions of the prophets. For Michea announced that the New Law would be given in this way: 'The law shall go forth out of Sion, and the word of the Lord out of Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people and he shall vanquish and rebuke nations.'¹ For that prior law which was given through Moses was given, not on Mount Sion, but on Mount Horeb. And the Sibyl showed that this would be destroyed by the Son of God. 'But when all these things have been fulfilled which he spoke, at that time then the whole law is destroyed.'²

But even Moses himself (and while they tenaciously cling to their argument that the law was given to them through him, they have fallen away from God and have not known him) had foretold that the greatest prophet would be sent from God. He would be One who is above the law, who presents the will of God to men.³ In Deuteronomy he left it written thus: 'And the Lord said to me: I will raise them up a prophet out of the midst of their brethren like to thee. And I will put my words in his mouth: And he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. And he that will not hear the words which that prophet shall speak in my name, I will be the revenger.'⁴ God, then, declared through His lawbearer himself that He would send His Son, that is, the present law and life, and that He would destroy the old law that had been given through a mortal, so that at last through Him who was eternal He might sanction the eternal law.

About the abolishing of circumcision, too, Isaia prophesied in this manner: 'For thus saith the Lord to the men of Juda and those who inhabit Jerusalem: Make renovation among yourselves and be renewed, and sow not upon thorns. Be circumcised to your God, and take away the foreskins of your

¹ Cf. Mich. 4.2,3.

² VIII.299,300.

³ He and the Giver of the Decalogue are one. Cf. John 10.30.

⁴ Cf. Deut. 18.17-19.

hearts, lest my indignation come forth like fire, and there be none that can quench it.⁵

Also Moses himself: 'In the last days the Lord God will circumcise thy heart that thou mayest love the Lord thy God.'⁶ And in like manner in Jesus, the son of Nun, the successor of Moses, we note: 'And the Lord said to Jesus: Make thee knives of stone exceedingly sharp and sit and circumcise a second time the children of Israel.'⁷ He said that this second circumcision would not be of the flesh as was the first, which the Jews still practice, but of the heart and spirit, which Christ, who was the true Jesus, gave.⁸

For the prophet does not speak this way: 'And the Lord said to me,' but *to Jesus*, in order to show that he was not speaking of himself but of Christ to whom God was then speaking. For that Jesus was a figure of Christ. Although he was first called Osee, Moses, foreseeing the future, ordered him to be called Josue (or Jesus), so that, since he was selected leader of the soldiery against Amalec who was attacking the children of Israel, he might overcome the adversary through the figure of his name and lead the people into the land of promise.⁹ And for this reason also he succeeded Moses, to show that the New Law given through Jesus Christ would succeed the Old Law which was given through Moses.

That circumcision of the flesh surely is without reason, because, if God wished it, He would have formed men thus from the beginning, not having the foreskin. But it was a figure of this second circumcision, signifying that the heart should be bared, that is, that we ought to live with an open and simple heart, because that part of the body which is cir-

5 The quotation is actually from Jer. (not Isa.) 4.3.4.

6 Cf. Deut. 30.6.

7 Cf. Jos. 5.2.

8 The Greeks called Josue 'Jesus' for the two names are the same in Hebrew. The meaning is 'savior.' It was not without significance. Moses by his law could only bring the people within sight of the promised inheritance, but our Savior, Jesus (prefigured by Josue), was to bring us into it.

9 Cf. Num. 13.9,17.

circumcised has a certain likeness to the heart and it is shame-causing. For this reason God ordered it to have its skin removed or be uncovered to warn us by this lesson that we should keep an uncovered heart, that is, that we should not veil any shameful deed within the secrets of conscience. This is the circumcision of the heart, of which the prophets speak, which God transferred from mortal flesh to the soul, which alone will last. In that circumcision He had placed before us penance, wishing us to look out for our life and salvation in accord with His everlasting affection, so that if we strip our hearts, that is, if we make to God satisfactory confession of our sins, we may attain pardon which is denied to those concealing their faults by Him who beholds not the face, as man does, but the hidden recesses of the heart.

The interdict on the eating of pork meat looks also to the same end. When God ordered them to abstain from pork, He meant this to be understood especially that they should abstain from their sins and impurities. For this animal is filthy and unclean and never looks up to the sky, but thrust upon the earth with its whole body and face, it ever lives for its belly and food. Nor is it able, while it lives, to perform any other use, as do the other animals, which furnish a means of riding, or help in the cultivation of the fields, or drag the wagons yoked to their necks, or carry packs on their backs, or provide clothing from their skins, or give forth a supply of milk, or watch as guardians of homes. Therefore, He commanded that they should not use the flesh of swine, that is, that they should not imitate the life of pigs who are nourished only unto death, lest serving their stomachs and pleasures they would be useless for the work of justice and would be afflicted with death. He commanded, likewise, that they should not plunge themselves into foul licentiousness, just as a sow which is absorbed in the mire, nor should they serve earthly images and stain themselves with mud. For those who venerate false gods, that is, idols of clay and earth, smear themselves with mud. Thus all the precepts of the Jewish law look toward

the working of justice, because they were given enigmatically, so that through the figure of carnal things the spiritual things might be understood.

Chapter 18

When Christ fulfilled, therefore, those things which God wished to be done and which He had spoken many ages before through His prophets, stirred up by those things and in ignorance of the divine writings, the Jews came together to condemn their God. Since He knew that this would be and said that hence it was necessary for Him to suffer and to be put to death for the salvation of many, He went apart, however, with His disciples, not to avoid what He must suffer and undergo, but to show that it would be necessary to act in this way in every persecution, lest anyone should seem to have fallen through his own fault.¹ And He announced also that He would be betrayed by one of them. So Judas, enticed by a reward, gave Him over to the Jews. They had Him seized and brought to Pontius Pilate, who was then ruling Syria as legate, and they demanded of him that Jesus be crucified, charging Him with nothing other than that He said He was Son of God, the King of the Jews. Also because He had said: 'If you destroy this temple which was six and forty years in building, I will raise it up in three days without hands.'²

He meant that His Passion would be brief and that when He was put to death by the Jews He would raise Himself up on the third day. For He Himself was the true temple of God. They fastened upon these words of His as though ill-omened and impious. When Pilate heard them and, when He said nothing in His own defense, he declared that nothing in Him seemed worthy of condemnation. But those most unjust accusers began to raise a tumult with the people whom they

¹ Cf. Tertullian, *Apology* c. 21; Cyprian, *That the Idols Are Not Gods*, c. 13.

² The reference is a combination of John 2.19,20, and Mark 14.58.

had aroused and to demand His crucifixion with violent cries. Then Pilate was conquered by their clamors and by the instigation of the tetrarch, Herod, fearing that he would be torn from power; but he would not deliver the sentence himself, however, and handed Him over to the Jews that they might judge Him according to their law.

They led Him away, then, to be scourged with whips and, before they fastened Him to the cross, they mocked Him. They clothed Him with a purple garment and with His head crowned with thorns they mockingly hailed Him as a King. They gave Him gall for food and mixed a drink of vinegar for Him. After this they spit in His face and slapped Him with their hands. And when those executioners were struggling over His garments, they cast lots among themselves for His tunic and pallium. While all these things were being done, He let not a word pass from His mouth, as though He were dumb. Then they suspended Him between two malefactors who were condemned for robbery, and they crucified Him.

What do I deplore here in so great a crime, or with what words shall I complain for such great evil? For we are not describing the Gavian cross which Marcus Tullius prosecuted with every fiber and all the strength of his eloquence, as though poured forth from the fountains of all his genius, proclaiming it an 'unworthy crime for a Roman citizen to be raised upon a cross against all laws.'³ That one, although he was innocent and undeserving of that punishment, was mortal, however, and he was afflicted by an evil man who did not know justice. What shall we say about the indignity of this cross on which God was fastened and hung by worshipers of God? Who so eloquent and endowed with such great abundance of material and words exists? What speech is there running over with the richness of such great wealth as to rightly deplore that cross which the world itself and all the elements of the world mourned? That these things would take place, however,

³ Cf. Cicero, *Against Verres* 5.61.150,151.

was announced beforehand by both the words of the prophets and the Sibylline chants.

The following is found in Isaia: 'I am not stubborn and I do not resist. I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that plucked them: I have not turned away my face from the foulness of them that spit upon me.'⁴ And David in Psalm 34 speaks in a similar strain: 'Scourgers were gathered together upon me and they knew it not. They were separated and repented not: they tempted me, they scoffed at me with scorn, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.'⁵

The Sibyl also pointed out that those same things would happen: 'Into wicked hands and those of the unfaithful he will afterwards come. They will heap upon God blows from unclean hands, and from impure mouths they will expel defiled sputum. But he will give for their blows simply a holy back.'⁶

Likewise of His silence, which He kept tenaciously even unto death, Isaia spoke again thus: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and he was as a lamb before his shearers, without a word, and thus he did not open his mouth.'⁷ And the above-mentioned Sibyl: 'And receiving the blows he will be silent, so that no one may know what the word is or whence he comes, in order that he might address the lowly and wear a crown of thorns.'⁸

Of the food and drink, however, which they offered Him before they put Him on the cross,⁹ David says in Psalm 68: 'And they gave me gall for my food, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.'¹⁰ And the Sibyl, too, sang of this same thing that would come to be: 'For food, however, they

⁴ Cf. Isa. 50.5,6.

⁵ Cf. Ps. 34.15,16.

⁶ *Sibylline Oracles* VIII.287 ff.; cf. also St. Augustine, *City of God* 18.23.

⁷ Cf. Isa. 53.7.

⁸ VIII.292 ff. Cf. St. Augustine, *loc. cit.*

⁹ Evidently this is the order of events Lactantius wishes to insist upon, Matthew (27.34,35) and Mark (15.23,24) give the presentation of the food and drink before the crucifixion, but Luke (23.36) and John (19.28,29) relate the presentation as being made to Jesus on the cross.

¹⁰ Ps. 68.22.

gave him gall and for his thirst they gave him vinegar; they will offer this table of inhospitality.¹¹ Another Sibyl chides the country of Judea with these verses: 'Foolish one, thou hast not known thy God playing with the minds of mortals, but you crowned him with thorns and mixed for him horrid gall.'¹²

That the Jews were going to lay hands on their God and kill Him, these testimonies of the prophets gave witness beforehand. In Esdras there is this passage: 'And Esdras spoke to the people: This pasch is our saviour and our refuge. Consider and let it ascend into your hearts that we intend to humiliate him with a sign. And after this we shall hope in him, lest this place be deserted for all times, saith the Lord of hosts. If you do not believe him nor hear his message, you will be for a derision among the peoples.'¹³ From this it is clear that the Jews have no other hope unless they wash themselves of the blood and put their hope in the very one whom they killed.

Isaia also marks their crime and says: 'In humility was his judgment taken away. Who shall declare his generation? Since his life will be taken away from the land, he has been led away to death by the wickedness of my people. And I shall give the ungodly for his burial and the rich for his death: because he hath done no iniquity, neither was there deceit in his mouth. Therefore he shall win very many, and he shall divide the spoils of the strong, because he hath been delivered to death, and he was reputed among the wicked. And he hath borne the sins of many, and he was delivered up because of their transgressions.'¹⁴

And David in Psalm 93: 'They will hunt after the soul of the just and condemn innocent blood, but the Lord has become my refuge.'¹⁵ Jeremia, too, said: 'Show me, O Lord,

¹¹ VIII.303,304.

¹² VI.22,23.

¹³ The passage is not found in the Book of Esdras, but cf. Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* 297D where the same reference is given.

¹⁴ Cf. Isa. 53.8,9,12.

¹⁵ Cf. Ps. 93.21,22.

and I shall know. Then I saw their plottings. And I was carried as a meek lamb to be the victim. They devised counsels against me, saying: Let us put wood on his bread and cut him off from the land of the living, and his name shall be remembered no more.'¹⁶ Now the wood signifies the cross and the bread His body, because He is Himself the food and life of all who believe in the flesh which He put on and by which He hung upon the cross.

But of this Moses himself spoke more plainly in Deuteronomy as follows: 'And thy life shall be hanging before thee. Thou shalt fear night and day: neither shalt thou trust thy life.'¹⁷ And, likewise, again in Numbers: 'And the Lord is not suspended as though a man, neither does he suffer threats as though a son of man.'¹⁸ Zacharia, too, gave them this: 'And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced.'¹⁹ And in like manner David spoke in Psalm 21: 'They have dug my hands and my feet, they have numbered all my bones. They have looked and stared upon me. They parted my garments amongst them, and upon my vesture they cast lots.'²⁰ Surely the prophet did not speak these things of himself. For he was king, and he never endured those indignities, but the Spirit of God was speaking through him, and He would have suffered those things a thousand and fifty years hence. For that many years are reckoned from the reign of King David to the death of Christ on the cross.

His son Solomon, too, who established Jerusalem, prophesied that she herself would perish unto the avenging of the holy cross: 'But if you turn away from me, saith the Lord, and will not keep my truth, I will cast away Israel from the land which I have given to them. And this house which I have built for them in my name, I will cast it forth from all, and Israel shall be for the ruin and disgrace for the people. And this

¹⁶ Cf. Jer. 11.18; and 19 (Douay).

¹⁷ Cf. Deut. 28.66.

¹⁸ Cf. Num. 23.19.

¹⁹ Cf. Zach. 12.10

²⁰ Cf. Ps. 21.17-19.

house shall be deserted, and everyone who shall pass by shall be astonished and shall say: Why hath the Lord done these evils to this land and this house? And they shall say: Because they forsook the Lord their God, and they persecuted their king, most beloved of God, and they crucified him in much humiliation. Therefore hath the Lord brought upon them all this evil.'²¹

Chapter 19

What more can be said now about the crime of the Jews than that they were then blinded and seized with incurable madness who, reading these prophecies daily, neither understood them nor were able to avoid what they were doing? Suspended, then, and fastened to His cross Christ cried out to God the Father in a loud voice and willingly laid down His life.¹ In that same hour there was an earthquake, and the veil of the temple which separated the two tabernacles was cut in two, and the sun was suddenly withdrawn, and from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness.² The prophet Amos bears witness to this. 'And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that the sun shall go down at midday, and the day shall be darkened of light. And I will turn your feasts into mourning and all your songs into lamentation.'³

And Jeremiah said: 'She is become terrified who giveth birth, and her soul hath fainted away. Her sun is gone down while it was yet day: she is confounded and ashamed. And the rest of them I will give up to the sword in the sight of their enemies.'⁴

Note the Sibylline prophecy, too: 'The veil of the temple

²¹ Cf. 3 Kings 9.6-9.

¹ Cf. Terullian, *Apology* c. 21.

² Cf. Mark 15.33.

³ Cf. Amos 8.9,10.

⁴ Cf. Jer. 15.9.

shall be split, and in the middle of the day there will be night with its darkness exceeding great for three hours.’⁵

When these things took place, they were not able to understand their crime even then by the celestial prodigies, but because He had foretold that He would rise again from the dead on the third day, fearing that, if His body were stolen and removed by His disciples, all would believe that He had arisen and that there would be a much greater confusion among the people, they took His body down from the cross, and enclosing it safely in a tomb, they surrounded it with a military guard. But on the third day, before light, there was a sudden quaking of the earth by which the sepulchre was suddenly opened up, and although the guards whom fright had astonished and stupified did not behold anything, He, coming forth from the tomb uncorrupted and alive, departed to Galilee to seek His disciples. Nothing was found in the sepulchre except the winding sheet with which they had bound and wrapped His body. The prophets had foretold, however, that He would not remain among the dead but would rise on the third day.

Hear David in Psalm 15: ‘Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell: nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption.’⁶ And also in the third psalm: ‘I have slept and have taken my rest: and I have risen up because the Lord hath protected me.’⁷

Osee also, the first of the twelve prophets, testified concerning His Resurrection: ‘This my son is wise: therefore now he shall not resist in the breach of his children. And I will deliver him out of the hand of death. O death, where is thy judgment, or where is thy sting?’⁸ And the same prophet says in another place: ‘He will revive us after two days on the third day.’⁹

And the Sibyl, too, said that he would impose a terminus on death after a sleep of three days: ‘And the sleep of death

5 VIII.305; cf. St. Augustine, *City of God* 18.23.

6 Cf. Ps. 15.10.

7 Cf. Ps. 3.6.

8 Cf. Osee 13.13,14.

9 Cf. Osee. 6.2.

having been undergone, he shall be dead for three days. And then coming back from the dead he shall come to light, the first of the resurrection, showing the beginning to those called.¹⁰ For He gained life for us by conquering death. No other hope of gaining immortality, therefore, is given to man, unless he believe in Him and take up that cross which must be carried and suffered.

Chapter 20

Setting out, therefore, into Galilee—for He was unwilling to present Himself to the Jews,¹ lest He bring them to repentance and cure those impious ones—He opened up to His disciples, who had again gathered together, the meanings of the Sacred Scripture, that is, the secret messages of the prophets, which were not able to be understood in any way at all before they were opened up, since they were foretelling Him and His Passion. It is for this that Moses and the very same prophets call the law which was given to the Jews, “The Testament,”² because unless the testator shall have died, it is not possible for the testament to be known; nor can it be known what is written in it, since it is closed and sealed. And so, unless Christ had undergone death, the testament could not have been opened, that is, the mystery of God could not have been revealed and understood.

The whole Scripture is divided into two testaments. That which preceded the coming of Christ and His Passion, that is, the law and the prophets, is called the Old Testament; those things which were written after His Resurrection are called the New Testament. The Jews use the Old; we the New. They

10 VIII.312-314; cf. St. Augustine, *loc. cit.*

1 For a comparable treatment of this point, and one which also contains the same attitude toward the Jews, cf. Tertullian's *Apology* c. 21.

2 We are more used to the term ‘Covenant’ from the Vulgate *pactum* and *foedus*, but *testamentum* is an Old Latin rendering, and the Septuagint uses *diatheke*. Cf. Exod. 19.5; Deut. 5.2, etc.

are not opposed, however, because the New is the fulfillment of the Old, and in both the testator is Christ, who by the death He underwent for us makes us heirs of the eternal kingdom from which the Jewish people have been debarred and disinherited, as the prophet Jeremia declares when he speaks such words as these: 'Behold the days are coming, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Juda. Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not persevere in my covenant, and I have neglected them, saith the Lord.'³

The same prophet speaks similarly in another place: 'I have forsaken my house, I have placed my inheritance into the hands of her enemies. My inheritance is become to me like a lion in the wood: it hath cried out against me. Therefore have I hated it.'⁴

Since His inheritance is the celestial kingdom, surely He does not mean to say He hates the inheritance itself, but the heirs who have risen up against Him ungraciously and impiously. 'My inheritance,' He said, 'is become to me as a lion'; in other words, 'I am become the prey and the prize to be devoured by my heirs who have immolated me as a beast.' 'It hath cried out against me,' that is, they have passed against me the sentence of death and the cross. That which He spoke above: 'that He would make a new covenant with the house of Juda,' shows that the Old Testament that was given through Moses was not perfect, and that that which would have to be given through Christ would be its consummation. The "house of Juda and of Israel" surely does not mean the Jews whom He has rejected, but us, who, called by Him from the Gentiles, have succeeded by adoption into their place, and we are called, 'The sons of the Jews.' The Sibyl declared this when she said:

³ Cf. Jer. 31.31-33.

⁴ Cf. Jer. 12.7,8.

'Of the blessed Jews a God-appointed nation of heavenly people.'⁵

That that people would come was taught by Isaia in whose prophecy the Almighty Father addresses His Son saying: 'I the Lord God have called thee unto justice, and I will take thee by the hand and will strengthen thee. And I have given thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles: that thou mightst open the eyes of the blind, and bring forth the prisoner out of prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.'⁶

Since, therefore, we were as though blind before, and when we sat as though enclosed by the prison house of foolishness in the darkness, not knowing God and His truth, we were enlightened by Him who adopted us by His testament (His will in our favor), and when He had freed us as from evils and bonds and brought us into the light of wisdom, He recognized us as the heirs of His heavenly kingdom.

Chapter 21

After His preaching of the Gospel and His Name to the disciples was completed,¹ He withdrew Himself suddenly, and the clouds took Him into heaven on the fortieth day after His Passion, just as Daniel had showed would happen when he said: 'Lo, one like the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. And he came even to the Ancient of days.'²

His disciples, however, dispersing through the provinces, made foundations of the Church everywhere, themselves performing great and almost incredible miracles in the name of God, their Master. For as He was departing, He had instructed them in the virtue and power, whereby the plan of the new

⁵ V.249.

⁶ Cf. Isa. 42.6-8.

¹ Cf. Tertullian, *Apology* c. 21.

² Cf. Dan. 7.13.

message might be established and confirmed. But He also made known to them all that would take place. Peter and Paul preached these things at Rome, and that preaching has remained in writing unto their memory. In this they have told 'both many other marvels and that this also would take place, that after a short time God would send a king who would attack the Jews and raze their cities to the ground and lay seige to them after they had been consumed with hunger and thirst. Then it would happen that they would feed on their own bodies and consume one another, and, at length captured, they would come into the hands of the enemy. And before their very eyes they would behold their wives most bitterly attacked, virgins violated and prostituted, boys snatched up, little ones torn from them and marred, and everything finally destroyed by fire and sword, the captives being taken away from their land forever. This, because they have exulted over the most loving and most noble son of God.'³ And so, after their death, when Nero had despatched them, Vespasian brought to nought the name and race of the Jews, and he did all the things which those two had foretold would come to pass.

Chapter 22

Those things which are regarded as false and incredible by those who have not been imbued with the true teaching of the divine scripture have been, I believe, affirmed. But in order that we may refute those who, not without their own evil, are too wise and take away faith from divine things, let us convince them of their error also with proofs, so that they may finally see how it was necessary for it so to be done, as we explain that it was done. And even though testimonies without proofs, or proofs without testimonies, have enough strength with good judges, we are not content, however, with

³ Cf. *The Preaching of Peter and Paul* (Helgenfeld edition of New Testament Apocrypha, 2, fascicle 4.58).

one or the other, when the two are at hand for us, lest we leave to any perversely ingenious person the chance of not understanding or of making a contrary interpretation. They deny that it could be possible for anything to withdraw from an immortal nature; they say, in fine, that it is not worthy of God to wish to become man and to burden Himself with the infirmity of flesh, to subject Himself to the passions, to grief, to death, just as though it would not be easy for Him to show Himself to men and teach them justice apart from the weakness of a body, if He wished that, and with the greater authority as of an acknowledged God. Then, they deny that all things would have been produced by divine commands, if the power and strength of a commanding God acceded to those things.

'Why, then,' they say, 'did He not come as God to teach men? Why did He make Himself so lowly and weak that He could be contemned by men and afflicted with punishment? Why did He suffer violence at the hands of weak, mortal men? Why did He not crush the forces of men with His power or avoid them by His divinity? Why did He not expose His majesty at least on the threshold of His death? And why was He led to judgment as a weakling, condemned as guilty, and slain as though mortal?' I will carefully refute these objections, and I will not suffer anyone to be in error. For those things were done according to a great and wondrous plan. Whoever perceives this plan will not only cease to wonder that God was crucified by man, but he will also clearly see that not even God could have been believed, if those very things of which He complained were not done.

Chapter 23

Whoever gives instructions for living to men and feigns the customs of others, I ask whether he himself ought to do those things which he charges or whether he ought not do them.

If he does not do them, the precepts are not binding. If those things which are commanded are good, if they place the life of man in an excellent state, then the preceptor himself should not separate himself from the numerous gathering of men with whom he is dealing. And he ought to live in the same manner in which he instructs others to live, lest, if he act otherwise, he should take away faith from his own precepts and make his teaching of lesser value, since he looses in very deed that which he strives by his words to bind fast.

And whenever anyone hears another giving commands, he does not want the necessity of obeying to be imposed upon him, as though the right of liberty were being taken away from him. So he answers the instructor in this way: 'I cannot do the things which you order since they are impossible. You forbid me to be angry, you forbid me to covet, to be moved by lust; you forbid grief, you forbid me to fear death. But this is so contrary to nature; all living creatures are subject to these passions. Or, if you think that nature can be resisted to such a degree, then you yourself, who command this, do it, so that I may know it can be done. But, when you yourself do not do it, what insolence is it to wish to impose on a free man laws which you yourself do not obey? You who teach, learn first, yourself; and before you correct the manners of others, correct your own.'

Who would deny that this answer is a just one? Nay, an instructor of this sort will rather come into contempt, and he will be mocked or deceived in turn, because he will be seen to deceive himself. What will such an instructor do, then, if he is confronted with these arguments? In what way will he deprive the unyielding insult-givers of their excuse, unless he shows by present deeds that he teaches possible things?

Thus it comes about that no one obeys the precepts of the philosophers. Men prefer examples to words, because to talk is easy, but to perform is difficult. Would that as many acted well as there are who speak well! But faith is not with those who preach and practice not. If they be men, they will be

contemned as of slight importance; if a god, people will object to the excuse of human frailty for him.

It remains that words be strengthened by works. This the philosophers were not able to do. So when the teachers themselves are mastered by the passions which they teach ought to be mastered, they can instruct no one unto that virtue which they teach falsely. And for that reason they think that up to now no one perfectly wise has ever existed, that is, one in whom the highest power of the greatest learning and knowledge and perfect justice are in accord, which was, indeed, true. For no one such as this has existed since the beginning of the world except Christ who both handed down wisdom by His words and strengthened His teaching by His immediate virtue.

Chapter 24

Let us consider now whether a teacher sent from heaven is able not to be perfect. I am not yet speaking of this One who they say did not come from God. Let us imagine that someone is to be sent from heaven to establish the life of men on the fundamentals of virtue and to form it according to justice. There can be no doubt in anyone's mind that that teacher who is sent from heaven is so endowed with the knowledge of all things as he is perfect in virtue, so that there is no difference in him between the heavenly and the earthly. Now in man there can be no internal and proper doctrine by any means, for the mind, enclosed in the earthly organs of man and impeded by the gradual decline of the body, is not able either to comprehend of itself or to grasp truth unless it be taught by someone. Even if this should be possible to an exceptional degree for one, he would not be able, however, to embrace the highest virtue and to resist all vices, the matter of which is contained in the inner parts of the body. From this it happens that an earthly teacher cannot be perfect. A heavenly

one, on the other hand, to whom divinity has granted knowledge, and immortality virtue, must of necessity be perfect and consummate in teaching as well as in other matters. But this is not altogether possible unless he takes on himself a human body. The reason is clear, however, why this is not possible. For if He should come to men as God (and I will omit mention of the fact that mortal eyes cannot behold or endure the brilliance of His Majesty), then God Himself would certainly not be able to teach virtue, because without a body He would not do those things which He would be teaching, and because of this, His teaching would not be perfect. But, on the other hand, if the highest virtue is to patiently endure sorrow for the sake of justice and duty; if virtue is not to fear death itself, even impending death, and to bravely withstand it when it has been inflicted, then that perfect teacher ought to teach those things by instructing and confirm them by doing, because he who gives the precepts of living ought to cut off the avenues of all excuses, in order to impose upon men the necessity of obeying, not from force but from honor, and still to leave them liberty so that a reward might be appointed even for those obeying, since they were able not to obey if they wished, and a punishment for those not obeying, since they were able to obey if they wished.

Now, how will excuse be able to be done away with, unless it be that he who teaches practices what he teaches and be, as it were, an ideal going before, and stretch out his hand to the one who will follow? But how can he do what he teaches, unless he be like to him whom he teaches? For if he is subject to no passion, man can answer to the teaching thus: 'Indeed, I wish not to sin, but I am overcome. For I am clothed with weak and fragile flesh; it is here that concupiscence resides; it is the flesh which grows angry, which grieves, which fears to die. So I am led against my will and I sin, not because I wish to, but because I am driven. I realize that I myself sin, but the necessity of weakness drives me and I am not able to resist it.' What will that preceptor of justice answer to this? How

will he refute and convince the man who will hold forth the flesh as an excuse for his sins, unless he himself be endowed with flesh to show that the flesh, too, can embrace virtue? For defiance cannot be convinced except by example. If those things which you teach cannot have strength unless you have done them first, because the nature of men, prone to evil, wants to seem to sin, not only with excuse but also with reason, it is necessary that the master and teacher of virtue become very similar to man, in order to teach man by conquering sin that sin is able to be conquered by him.

But if He should be not human, He can in no way propose an example to man. For, then, someone will instantly rise up and say: 'You, indeed, do not sin, because you are free from this body. You do not suffer concupiscence, because nothing is necessary to immortality; but to me there is need of many things to protect this life. You do not fear death, because it can be of no avail in you; you condemn sorrow, because you can suffer no violence. But I, a mortal, fear both, because they bring the gravest tortures upon me which the weakness of my flesh cannot bear.' And so the teacher of virtue ought to take even this excuse away from men, so that no one may ascribe the fact that he sins to necessity rather than to his fault. Therefore, that He may be perfect, nothing ought to be cast up to Him by him who is to be taught, so that if he should say perhaps, 'You advise the impossible,' He may answer, 'Lo, I myself do them.' 'But I am covered with flesh whose proper act is sinning.' 'And I bear that same flesh, and still sin does not dominate in Me.' 'For me it is difficult to despise riches, because one cannot live otherwise in conjunction with this body.' 'Behold, I have a body too, and I fight against all cupidity.' 'I cannot bear for justice's sake either pain or death, because I am weak.' 'Behold, even over Me pain and death have power, and, yet, those very things which you fear I conquer so that I may make you a victor over pain and death. I go before through those things which you pretend cannot be withstood: if you cannot follow one telling you

how to do it, follow one who shows you how by going before you on the way.' In this way every excuse is removed, and man must confess that he is through his own fault unjustified who does not follow the Teacher of virtue and that same Leader.

You see, therefore, how much more perfect is an earthly or mortal teacher, because he can be a leader for a mortal man, than an immortal one who is not subject to the passions. However, that I prefer man to God is not the point here at all, but that I may show that neither is a man able to be of perfect teaching, unless he is at the same time God in order to impose the necessity of obeying on men by His authority, nor is God, unless He be clothed with a mortal body in order to constrain others with the necessity of obeying by carrying out His own precepts by His deeds. It is clearly evident, then, that He who is the Guide of Life and the Master of Justice must have a body, and that in no other way is it possible that His doctrine be complete and perfect, and having root and foundation remain fixed and stable with men. And it is necessary, too, that He Himself undergo the weakness of flesh and a body and possess within Himself the virtue of which He is the teacher, so that He may teach by both word and action. Besides, He must be subject to death and all the passions, since the exercise of virtue consists in enduring and undergoing death. All these things, as I have said, the most perfect of teachers ought to endure in order to show that they can be endured.

Chapter 25

Let men learn, therefore, and let them understand why Almighty God, when He sent His Ambassador and Messenger to teach mankind the precepts of His justice, wished Him to be clothed with mortal flesh and to be afflicted with torture and to be condemned to death. For when there was no justice on

the earth, He sent a teacher, a living law, as it were, to establish His Name and a new temple, to sow the seeds of true and loving worship throughout the whole earth by His words and example. But, in order that it might be certain that He was sent from God, it was not necessary for Him to be born in just such a way as man is born from the union of two mortals, but that He might appear heavenly even in the form of man, He was formed without the operation of a human father. He had a spiritual Father, God, and just as the Father of His Spirit is God, there being no mother, so the mother of His Body is a virgin and there is no father. He was, therefore, both God and man, constituted midway between God and man (whence the Greeks call Him Mediator), to be able to lead man to God, that is, to immortality. Because if He had been just God, as was said above, He could not have offered an example of virtue to man. If He were only man, He could not compel men to justice, unless authority and power greater than man's were added. For since man consists of flesh and spirit, and since it is necessary for the spirit to merit by works of justice to become eternal, the flesh, because it is earthly and, therefore, mortal, draws the spirit joined to it along with it, and leads it away from immortality to death. Therefore, a spirit, free of the flesh, was not able to be a leader unto immortality for man under any condition since the flesh impedes the spirit from following God. For it is weak and subject to sin, and sin is the food of death.

For this reason, therefore, a Mediator came, that is, God in flesh, so that the flesh could follow Him, and that He might save man from death whose mastery is according to the flesh. And He clothed Himself with humanity, the flesh, so as to show by subduing the desires of the flesh that sin was not of necessity, but of purpose and free will. We do have one great, outstanding struggle with the flesh, whose limitless desires press against the soul and do not allow it to retain the mastery, but manacled by pleasures and sweet enticements, they afflict it with everlasting death. But that we might be able to resist

these also, God has opened up and shown to us the way of overcoming the flesh. This perfect virtue, and absolute by every reckoning, imparts the crown and reward of immortality to the victors.

Chapter 26

I have spoken of lowliness and weakness and passion and why God should have preferred to undergo these. Now an account of the cross itself must be rendered and we must tell of its power. Why the Almighty Father decided it from the beginning, and how He ordained all things which were done, not only the prediction of the prophets which came true in Christ, but also the plan of the Passion itself shows. For whatever things He suffered were not meaningless, but they had the meaning of a figure and great significance, as did also those divine works which He performed. The force and power of these had value, indeed, at the time of their occurrence, but they also declared something for future reference.

He opened the eyes of the blind. A heavenly power opened the eyes of the blind and restored light to those who did not see. But by this act He signified that turning toward the peoples that knew not God, He would enlighten the minds of those not learned with the light of wisdom, and He would open the eyes of their hearts for the contemplation of truth. For, truly, they are blind who, not seeing the things of heaven and overwhelmed with the darkness of ignorance, venerate fragile idols of earth.

He opened up the ears of the deaf. That heavenly power was certainly not functioning only up to this point, but He was declaring that in a short time those who were without the truth would both hear and understand the divine words of God. For, truly, you would admit that they are deaf who do not hear the true heavenly instruction which must be carried out.

He loosened the tongues of the dumb so that they spoke. Marvelous power, even when this alone was being done! But there was another signification in this power which showed that soon those, lately ignorant of heavenly things, would be sowing abroad lessons learned of wisdom about God and His truth. For he who is ignorant of the nature and existence of the divinity is truly speechless and dumb, although he be the most eloquent of all men. When the tongue begins to speak the truth, that is, virtue, and to interpret the majesty of the one God, then, at last, it is performing the function of its nature. But as long as it speaks false things, it is not working according to its own usefulness, and, therefore, of necessity he is but an infant¹ who is not able to speak of divine things.

The limbs and feet of the lame, also, He reformed so that they might exercise the power of walking. This strength of the divine work is laudable. The figure contained in the act is this, that the way of truth would be opened to those restrained by the errors of a worldly and devious life over which men might walk to attain the grace of God. For that one is to be considered lame, indeed, who, involved in the mist and shadows of foolishness and ignorant of where he is tending, with stumbling and falling steps advances over the road of death.

He, likewise, cleansed the sores and spots of polluted bodies. This was no mean exercise of His immortal power, and in truth it portended this, that His doctrine, by the instruction it has unto justice, would purify those defiled by the sores of sin and the stains of vices. For they, indeed, ought to be regarded as leprous and afflicted with elephantiasis whom limitless desires for crime or insatiable delights for wantonness drive and leave branded with a lasting sore because of the stains of their disgraces.

He raised up the bodies of those lying dead, and calling upon them by name He brought them back from death. What more befitted God? What more worthy miracle of all ages

¹ The word *infans* means 'not speaking.'

than this, namely, to have allotted again a life that was run, to have added to the completed years of men, to have unveiled the secrets of death? But this unspeakable power was the image of a greater. It showed that His teaching would have such great force that all nations in the world, which were strangers to God and subject to death, revived by a knowledge of the true light would come to the rewards of immortality. For you would rightly consider as dead those who, not knowing God as the giver of life and turning aside their souls from heaven to earth, rush headlong into the snares of eternal death.

Therefore, the things which He did then in the actual time of their performance were images of future events; the powers He displayed on diseased and afflicted bodies carried a figure of spiritual effects, so that in the present action He showed works of no earthly power, and He also made clear the power of His celestial majesty that would come to be revealed.

Just as His works had also a significance of even greater power, so His Passion, too, was not without hidden meaning; nor was it in vain, nor did it happen fortuitously. But as those things which He did signified the great power and strength of His doctrine, so those things which He suffered announced that His wisdom would be hated. For the drink of vinegar and food of gall promised sharpness and bitterness in this life for the followers of His truth. And although the very Passion, sharp and bitter of itself, gave us an indication of future torments, which virtue proposes to those remaining in this world, still, food and drink of this sort coming into the mouth of our Teacher, furnished us with an impulse and an example for labors and sorrows. It is necessary for those who follow truth to bear and endure all these things, since truth is bitter and hateful to all who, without truth, give their lives to death-bearing pleasures.

The crown of thorns placed on His head indicated that He would gather unto Himself a divine people from those hurting Him.² For the people surrounding the earth are said to be

² Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* VIII.294,295.

a crown. We who were unjustified before our knowledge of God were thorns, that is, evil and harmful, not knowing what was good, and, removed from the notion and works of justice, we defiled everything with crime and wickedness. Then, picked from the thickets and briars, we surround the sacred Head of God, because, having been called by Him and coming around to Him from all sides, we stand by our Master and Teacher, our God, and crown Him King of the world and Lord of all the living.

With regard to the cross, moreover, there is great strength and purpose in that which I will now attempt to present. For God, as I have explained above,³ when He had determined to set man free, appointed a Master of virtue from the earth who would form men by salutary precepts unto innocence and by His present works and deeds would disclose the way of justice; and man by walking on this way and following his Teacher would arrive unto eternal life. He was 'bodied,' therefore, and clothed with the garment of flesh, in order that He might furnish man whom He had come to teach the example and inspiration of virtue. But when He had furnished the specimen of justice in all the functions of life, in order that He might give man patience in trial, also, and contempt of death (for in these two virtue is made perfect and consummated), He came into the hands of a wicked people, although He could have avoided this by His knowledge of the future, and He could have repelled it by the same power with which He was performing miracles. So He underwent the torture, the scourges, the thorns. Lastly, He did not refuse to undertake even death, so that man would triumph, under His leadership, over exacting and unremitting death with all of its terrors.

This is the reason the Father Almighty selected that extreme kind of death with which He allowed Him to be afflicted. Someone may say: 'Why, if He were God and wanted to die, was He not visited with some honorable kind of death, at

³ In chs. 23-25.

least? Why the extreme of the cross? Why this infamous kind of punishment which seems unworthy of a free man even, although he be dangerous?' First, because He who had come in a lowly state to bring help to the lowly and weak and to hold out hope of salvation to all was afflicted with that type which is customary for the weak and downtrodden, lest there be anyone at all who could not imitate Him. Then, in order that His body be preserved entire which He was to raise from the dead on the third day. For not anyone was to be ignorant of this, because He Himself, speaking beforehand about His Passion, also made it known that He had the power of laying down and of taking His life up again when He wished. So He was taken down from the cross after He had laid down His life. His murderers did not think it necessary to break His bones, as was their custom, but they only pierced His side. Thus His whole body was removed from the gibbet, and it was carefully enclosed in a sepulchre. All these things were done for this reason, that a broken and diminished body might not be rendered unfit for His Resurrection. That was also a special reason why God preferred the cross, because it was necessary for Him to be exalted by it and for the Passion of God to be known to all peoples. For since He who is suspended on a gibbet is conspicuous to all and is higher than others, a cross was rather chosen, which signified that He would be so conspicuous and so exalted, that all the nations throughout the world would run together to know and serve Him. Finally, no nation is so inhuman, no region so remote, that His Passion or the sublimity of His Majesty is not known by it. Therefore, He extended His arms in the Passion and embraced the world, so as to show them that from the rising to the setting of the sun a great people gathered from every tribe and tongue would come, and would take up that greatest symbol of all and bear it high on their foreheads. The Jews even today practice the figure of this when they mark their doorposts with the blood of the lamb. For when God was about to strike the Egyptians, in order to keep the Hebrews

unharmd by that plague, He had ordered them to immolate a white lamb without blemish and to put the mark of its blood on their doorposts. And so, when every first-born among the Egyptians perished that one night, the Hebrews alone were safe because of the sign of the blood, not because the blood of an animal had such great power in itself to be salvation for men, but it had been an image of future events. For the white lamb without a blemish was (a symbol of) Christ, that is, innocent, and just, and holy, who was immolated by those same Jews for the salvation of all who have written the sign of the blood, that is, of the cross on which He shed it, on their foreheads. For the forehead is the very high 'doorpost' of man, and the wood sprinkled with blood is the signification of the cross. Lastly, the immolation of the animal by those very people who carry out the feast is called the Pasch, because it is a figure of the Passion which God in His foreknowledge of the future gave through Moses to be celebrated by His people.⁴ But then the figure had value for dispelling the danger there present, so that it might be clear how much the truth itself would be able to accomplish for protecting the people of God in the extreme necessity of the whole world. How or in what stroke all those in the future would be safe who shall have marked this sign of the true and divine Blood on the highest part of their bodies, I will explain in the last book.⁵

Chapter 27

Now it is sufficient to explain how much the power of this sign can accomplish.¹ How much terror this sign causes demons he will know who has seen how far they flee from the bodies they have obsessed when commanded in the name

⁴ The name of the feast comes from *paschein*, the Greek word 'to suffer.'

⁵ The editors of the Vienna text, Brandt and Laubmann, indicate that this place is not found in Book VII; cf. ch. 16, however.

¹ Cf. Tertullian's *Apology* c. 23.

of Christ.² For just as He Himself put all demons to flight by a word when He was living among men, and as He put back into their former sensibilities the disturbed minds of men and those raging from the evil incursions, so now His followers by the name of their Master and by the sign of His Passion exclude those same defiled spirits from men. The proof of this is not difficult. For if someone is present having a signed forehead when they make sacrifices to their false gods, the sacred rites cannot be acceptable in any way, 'Nor can this consulted seer render any response.'³ And this was often a special reason for the persecuting of justice on the part of evil kings. For when certain ones of our attendants were present with their masters who would be offering false sacrifices, they put their gods to flight by making the sign on their foreheads, lest they would be able to indicate the future in the entrails of the victims. When the soothsayers realized this, at the instigation of those same demons to whom they were making the sacrifice, by complaining that profane men were present at the sacred rites, they drove their chiefs into a rage so that they violated the temple of the god and contaminated themselves by real sacrilege which was expiated by the most serious punishments of the persecutors. And yet blind men cannot understand, however, from this very thing, either that this is the true religion in which such great power for conquering resides, or that one that is false is not able to make a stand or to hold out in contention. But they say that the gods do this, not in fear, but in hatred, as if it were possible for anyone to hate anyone except him who harms him or who can harm him. Indeed, it would be more fitting to majesties to afflict those whom they hate with present punishments rather than to flee them. But since they can neither approach those in whom they have seen the heavenly mark, nor harm those whom the immortal sign has fortified as though by an impregnable wall,

² It is said that this is true even in the case of more recent possessions and obsessions by the devil. Though such phenomena were more frequent in the early days, they caused no less terror.

³ Vergil, *Georgics* 3.491.

they harass them through men, and they persecute them at the hands of others. Certainly, if they admit them to be these, we have conquered.

It is necessary that this religion be true which knows the plan of the demons and understands their astuteness and frustrates their power and forces them, quelled and subjected by spiritual arms, to yield. If they deny this, they will be disproved by the testimonies of the poets and philosophers. But if they do not deny that they are evil, what remains for them except to say that some are gods and others are demons? Then, let them explain to us the difference between the two kinds that we may know what ought to be worshiped and what execrated, and whether there is any alliance between them, or whether, in fact, they are enemies. If they have been joined by some connection, how far shall we separate them, or how will we not mingle the cult and honor of each type? If they are enemies, why do the demons not fear the gods, or why can the gods not put the demons to flight?

Now, take someone struck by an impulse of a demon: he rages; he is carried outside himself; he is insane. Let us take this one into a temple of Jupiter, the Great, the Mighty, or, because Jupiter does not know how to cure men, into a shrine of Aesculapius or Apollo. Let the priest of whichever one of them you please order in the name of his god that the harming spirit leave the man. This cannot happen in any way at all. What sort of power have the gods, then, if they do not hold the demons subject to them? But the same demons, however, when adjured by the name of the true God, leave at once. What is the reason that they fear Christ and do not fear Jupiter, unless it is that they are the same demons who the mob thinks are gods? Finally, if they are set up in a central place, both he who is generally known to be enduring an attack from the demons, and a seer of Delphic Apollo, they will shudder at the name of God in the same way; and Apollo will depart from his seer as quickly as the demoniacal spirit from the other man, and when his god has been adjured and

put to flight, the seer will be at rest thenceforth. Those are the same demons, therefore, who they acknowledge ought to be execrated, and they are the very same gods whom they supplicate.

If they do not think that we ought to be believed, let them believe Homer, who has associated that supreme Jupiter with the demons.⁴ Let them believe the other poets and philosophers, too, who call the same ones now demons, now gods, the one time true, and the other false. For those most evil spirits, when they are adjured, then confess that they are demons; when they are cultivated, then they lie that they are gods, in order to fill men with errors and call them away from the notion of the true God, through which alone can eternal death be avoided. They are the same who, for the sake of casting down man, established for themselves various cults throughout various regions, but the names have been lied about and assumed so that they might carry on the deception. Because they were not able to affect divinity through themselves, they applied to themselves the names of powerful kings, under whose titles they claimed for themselves the honors of gods. This error can be discussed and brought into the light of truth.

If anyone is eager to delve into this more deeply, let him summon those who have the skill of summoning spirits from the nether regions. Let them call Jupiter, Neptune, Vulcan, Mercury, Apollo, and Saturn, the father of them all. They will all answer from the depths, and when questioned they will speak and will make confession both about themselves and about God. After these let them call upon Christ. He will not be present; He will not appear, because He was not more than two days in the earth. What more certain than this proof can be brought forth? And I have no doubt that Trismegistus by this method somehow arrived at the truth, for he said everything about God the Father and many things about God the Son which are contained in the divine secrets.

⁴ Cf. Homer, *Iliad* A 222.

Chapter 28

Since things are as I have showed, it appears that no other hope of life has been proposed to man except that, rejecting vanities and miserable error, he come to know God and serve Him, and that he renounce this temporal life and instruct himself by the rudiments of justice for the practice of true religion. For we come to be under this condition, that we pay the just debt of service to the God who brings us into being, that we know Him alone, that we follow Him. We are fastened and bound to God by this bond of piety, whence religion itself takes its name.¹ The word is not as Cicero interpreted it from 're-reading,' or 'choosing again' (*relegendo*). For in his second book, *On the Nature of the Gods*, he spoke thus: 'Not only the philosophers but also our ancestors separated superstition from religion. For those who prayed and sacrificed entire days that their children might be survivors (*superstites*) of them, were called superstitious. But those who performed all things which pertained to the worship of the gods, who went back over them and gathered them up again, as it were, were called religious from that word regathering (*relegendo*) just as people are called select (*elegantes*) from selecting (*eligendo*), esteemed (*diligentes*) from esteeming (*diligendo*), and intelligent from comprehending (*intellegendo*).² In all of these words there is the same force of the word "choosing" or "gathering" (*legendi*) as in religious (*religioso*). So it happened in the case of superstitious and religious, that the one word became descriptive of a vice, the other of praiseworthiness.'³

We can know from the matter itself how inept this interpretation is. For if superstition and religion are engaged in wor-

1 This etymology still delights. *Religio*, a binding again or refastening is perhaps from *re* and *ligo*, to tie or fasten. Some have found Cicero's meaning acceptable, taking it from *re* and *lego*. Religion as a virtue may perhaps be considered as a re-choosing of the service of God whom we have left through willfulness.

2 The English equivalents fall far short of the meaning of the original, but the temptation is to affect a word play if possible.

3 Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods* 2.28.71,72. Cf. St. Augustine, *On True Religion* c. 113; Isidore, *Origines* 8.2.2.

shipping the same gods, there is slight or rather no difference. What reason can it show me why praying for the safety of one's children once is thought to be religious, and to do the same thing ten times is the mark of a superstitious man? For if it is a fine thing to do once, how much more so the more often it is done? If fine at the first hour, then also during the whole day; if one victim is placable, then many are surely more so, because multiplied obsequies oblige rather than offend. Those servants who have been dutiful and ready to obey do not seem hateful to us, but rather dear. Why, then, is he at fault, or why does he receive a reprehensible name who loves his children more, or who honors the gods more, while he who does so less is praised? This argument has strength even from the contrary. If it is a crime to pray and offer sacrifice all the day long, then it is to do so once; if it is wrong to desire to have one's children as survivors, then that one is superstitious who has only rarely wished for that. Or why has the name of a vice been drawn from that act than which nothing more honorable, nothing more just, can be desired? For because he says that the 'religious people are named that from regathering (relegendo), and they are those who diligently go over those things which pertain to the worship of the gods,' why, then, do those who do this often in a day lose the name of religious, when certainly they take up again more diligently from their very carefulness those things by which the gods are worshiped? Why, then, is it? Surely, because religion is a worship of the true; superstition of the false. And it is important, really, why you worship, not how you worship, or what you pray for. But because the worshippers of the gods think that they are religious, though they are superstitious, they can neither distinguish religion from superstition, nor can they explain the significance of the names.

We have said that the name of religion is taken from the bond of piety,⁴ because God has bound and fastened man to Himself by piety, since it is necessary for us to serve Him as

⁴ The deep significance of the Latin *pietas*, duty and devotion to God, to home, to country, has not been preserved in the English *piety*.

Lord and obey Him as Father. Therefore, much better is the way in which Lucretius interpreted the name when he spoke of 'loosening the knots of religions.'⁵ Not those who desire their children to survive them are called superstitious, for we all desire that, but either those who cherish the surviving memory of the dead, or those who as survivors of their parents honored their images in the home as though they were household gods. Those who took unto themselves new rites, so that they honored, in the place of gods, the dead who they thought were taken from among men into heaven, were called superstitious, but those who revered the public and ancient gods were called religious. Whence Vergil: 'Empty superstition, and ignorant of the old gods.'⁶ But when we discover that the ancient gods also were consecrated in the same manner after their death, then they are superstitious who worship many and false gods; but we, who supplicate the one true God, are religious.

Chapter 29

Perhaps someone may ask how, when we say that we worship one God, we may confidently speak of the two, God the Father and God the Son.¹ This assertion plunges many into the greatest error. Since those things which we say seem probable, they think that we fall in this one point, that we confess both the one God and a mortal one. We have already spoken about that mortality (or human nature) of God: now let us explain about the unity. When we say that the Father is God and the Son is God, we do not speak of a different God, nor do we separate the two, for the Father cannot be separated from the Son nor the Son from the Father, inasmuch as the Father cannot be named without the Son, nor can the Son be be-

⁵ *On the Nature of Things* 1.932.

⁶ *Aeneid* 8.187.

¹ It is curious that our author does not seem concerned to emphasize the Third Person. But at his time the chief heresies were concerned with the Person of Christ and His Natures.

gotten without the Father. Since, therefore, the Father makes the Son and the Son the Father, there is one mind in each, one spirit, one subsistence; but, the one is as though an overflowing fount or source, the other as though a stream flowing from that, the one a sun, the other a direct ray from the sun.² Since He is both faithful and dear to the Father, He is not separated, just as a stream is not separated from its source nor a ray from the sun, because the water of the source is in the stream and the light of the sun in the ray. Equally, neither can the voice be separated from the mouth, nor the power and the hand be sundered from the body. Therefore, when the hand of God and the power of God and the word of God are mentioned by the prophets, surely no distinction is intended, because both the tongue, the instrument of speech, and the hand, in which strength resides, are individual parts of the body. We may use a particular example. When someone has a son whom he loves uniquely, who although he is at home and under the power of his father, he may grant him the name and power of master, but by civil law, however, only one home and one master are recognized. So this world is the one home of God; and the Son and Father, who inhabit the world together and in accord, are the one God, because the one is as though two and the two are as one.³ Nor is this strange, since the Son is in the Father because the Father loves the Son, and the Father is in the Son because He faithfully obeys the will of the Father, and He never does nor has He ever done anything but what the Father wished or ordered.

Finally, that the one God is both Father and Son, Isaiah showed in that reference which we quoted above when he said: 'They shall worship thee and shall make supplication to thee, because God is in thee, and there is no God besides thee.'⁴ In another place he says in a similar way: 'Thus saith the

² Attention must be called to the fact that Lactantius wrote before the Golden Age of Patristic writing when so many of our theological problems received expression both lucidly accurate and exquisitely beautiful. Cf. Tertullian, *Apology* c. 21.

³ Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 33.1.

⁴ Cf. Isa. 45.14.

Lord, the King of Israel and the eternal God who raised Him up: I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God.’⁵ Although He mentioned the two Persons, that of God the King, that is, Christ, and of God the Father, who raised Him from the dead after His Passion—just as we have said that the prophet Osee made clear who said: ‘I will deliver him from the hand of death,’⁶ referring, however, to each Person he continued: ‘And besides me there is no God.’ Although he could have said, ‘besides us’; but it was not right that a separation of such a great closeness of relationship be made by using the plural number. For there is only one, free, supreme God, lacking an origin, since He Himself is the origin of things, and in Him at the same time both His Son and all things are contained. Wherefore, since the mind and will of the One Person are in the Other, or rather, since the one is in both, rightly the two Persons are called One God, because whatever is in the Father flows to the Son, and whatever is in the Son descends from the Father.

It is not possible, therefore, for that supreme and only God to be worshiped except through the Son. He who thinks that he worships the Father alone, just as he does not worship the Son, he does not even worship the Father. But he who accepts the Son and bears His Name, he worships truly the Father together with the Son, because the Son is the Ambassador and Messenger and Priest of the Almighty Father. This One is the Gate of the mighty temple; He is the Way of light; He is the Leader of salvation; He is the Port of life.

Chapter 30

But since many heresies have arisen, and since the people of God have been sundered by the instigations of the demons, the truth must be accurately determined by us and placed in

⁵ Cf. Isa. 44.6.

⁶ Cf. Osee 13.14. Cf. ch. 19.

its own proper dwelling place, so that if anyone wishes to 'drink of the water of life,'¹ he will not be drawn aside 'to broken cisterns'² that have no water course of supply, but he will come to know the richest fountain of God Himself, and watered there, he may gain everlasting life. Before all things we should know that He Himself and His legates had foretold that many sects would have existence which should break the concord of His holy body, and they warned that we should be wary with extreme prudence, lest we should ever fall into the snares and deceits of that adversary of ours with whom God has wished us to be in conflict. These they gave certain injunctions which we ought to keep forever. Many people, unmindful of these commands, deserting the path to heaven, have founded for themselves erroneous paths over widening and steep places, through which they might lead astray to darkness and death a cautionless and simple part of the people.

I will explain just how far this has come about. There were certain ones among us, either of not very strong faith, or less well-instructed, or careless, who caused a break in the unity and dispersed or scattered the Church. Those whose faith was slippery (tottering and insecure), although they pretended that they knew and worshiped God, increasing their resources and eager for honor, took unto themselves the great priesthood. And overcome by the more powerful, they preferred to secede with their supporters rather than to endure those who had been placed over them, over whom they themselves before had desired to be placed. Some, however, not informed enough with heavenly science, since they could not answer to the accusers of the truth who objected that it was impossible or not fitting for a God to enclose Himself in the womb of a woman, and that heavenly Majesty could not have been brought to such infirmity as to be the contempt, derision, object of insult, and mockery of men, and, finally, to endure tortures and be fastened upon an infamous gibbet; since they

¹ Cf. John 4.13.

² Cf. Jer. 2.13.

could not defend all these points with skill and doctrine nor make any refutation of them—for they did not see through their force and purpose deeply—they were perverted, and they corrupted the sacred teachings so that they composed a new doctrine for themselves, one without any root or stability. Some others, however, ensnared by the preaching of false prophets, of whom the true prophets and Christ Himself had spoken, fell away from the teaching of God and abandoned the true tradition.

But all of them, trapped by the frauds of the devil which they ought to have foreseen and avoided, lost the divine name and worship through imprudence. For whether they are Phrygians,³ or Novatians,⁴ or Valentinians,⁵ or Marcionites,⁶ or Anthropians,⁷ or any others that might be named, they

³ This is the first name for the Montanists, schismatics of the second century. The sect was founded by Montanus and two prophetesses in Phrygia. In the beginning there were no particular false doctrines (though the prophetesses went to excess, perhaps influenced by the Phrygian cult of Cybele), but later they taught that the Holy Spirit did not proceed from the Father and the Son and that He was sent first to Montanus. Tertullian joined the sect and is known as their greatest member.

⁴ Novatian was a schismatic of the third century and founder of the sect which bears his name. He was a Roman priest who made himself antipope. His errors on idolatry and the treatment of the lapsed which were refuted by Cyprian are not too important, but the case of his illegitimate consecration is a strong witness for the authority and primacy of Rome even at that time.

⁵ This is the sect founded by Valentinus, the best known of the Gnostics. He was an Egyptian who separated from communion with Rome. His errors are largely philosophical, being tainted with pantheism and dualism. His Christology is extremely confusing. He maintained the redeeming work of three redeeming beings, but held that Christ's body was not real.

⁶ The Marcionites were established at Rome in 144 by Marcion and continued there for some 300 years but longer in the East. Christ was taught to be not the Son of the God of the Jews (they rejected the Old Testament), but the Son of the Good God who was different. They possessed the Manichaeistic notion of dualism also.

⁷ Anthropians. No doubt by this term Lactantius is referring collectively to all those anthropomorphisers who, like the pagans, represented God in human form. He may, however, have reference to the particular sect founded by Audius in the fourth century in Syria. These took the text of Genesis 1.27 literally and held that God has a human form. Most of the Fathers dismiss them almost contemptuously. This attack by Lactantius should be enough to free him from the label of anthropomorphism which is sometimes attached to him.

have ceased to be Christians who, having lost the name of Christ, have put on human and external names. Therefore, the Catholic Church alone is the one which retains true worship. This is the fount of truth; this is the domicile of faith; this is the temple of God. And if one does not enter this and go out from it, he is cut away from the hope of life and salvation. No one ought to coax himself with pertinacious wrangling. The question is of life and salvation. And unless this is diligently and carefully considered, it will be lost and become extinct.

But because the individual groups of heretics think that they are the strongest Christians and that theirs is the Catholic Church, it must be learned that that is the true one in which there is confession and penance which healthfully cares for the sins and wounds to which the weakness of the flesh is subject. Meanwhile, I have presented these matters in a few words for the sake of warning, lest anyone wishing to escape from error be involved in greater error, while he is ignorant of the innermost shrine of truth. Afterwards, we shall more fully and elaborately fight against all those sects of lies in a special and separate work.

It follows that, since we have spoken sufficiently about true religion and wisdom, in the next book we shall discuss justice.

BOOK FIVE

CONCERNING JUSTICE

Chapter 1



HERE IS NO DOUBT in my mind that if any one of those foolishly religious persons, as they are exceedingly intolerant of superstition, should come upon this work of ours in which claim is made for that singular Creator of all things and the Ruler of this immense universe, he would rail against it even with maledictions, and after scarcely reading the beginning perhaps, he would attack it, reject it, and curse it, and think himself contaminated and bound up with crime if he should read these chapters patiently or listen to them being read.¹ However, of this one we ask, by right of humanity if it is possible, that he should not condemn the work before he has come to know it entirely. For if to sacrilegious persons and traitors and sorcerers the chance of defending themselves is given, and if it is not permitted to precondemn anyone for an unknown reason, we do not seem to make the request unjustly, that if anyone happen upon this work, if he reads it, let him read it through; if he hears it read, let him put off his opinion until it is completed. But I know the obstinacy of men; we will never obtain what we request. For they fear that vanquished by us they might be forced sometime to yield when truth itself clamors. They become troublesome, therefore, and they protest, so they will

¹ Cf. Tertullian, *Apology* c. 1; Minucius Felix, c. 27.8, and Salvian, *The Governance of God*, 5.20.

not hear, and they cover their eyes, lest they behold the light which we present to them. Certainly, they show by this the want of confidence in their own depraved reason when they do not dare to learn or join issue, because they are easily overcome. And for this reason, when discussion is done away with, 'Wisdom is driven from the midst, the matter is conducted by force,' as Ennius says.² And because they are eager to condemn as harmful those whom they know to be surely innocent, they do not wish to be consistent about innocence itself, as if it were, in fact, a greater iniquity to have condemned a proved innocence than an unheard one.

But, as I said, they are afraid that if they heard it they might not be able to condemn, and therefore, they torture, kill, and get rid of the worshipers of the supreme God, that is, the just. Nor can those who hate so vehemently render the causes of their hatred. Because they themselves are in error, they are angry with those who follow the true way. And although they are able to correct themselves, they add to the pile of their errors with cruel deeds; they are defiled with the blood of the innocent, and they torture the minds of those dedicated to God by the mangling of their bodies. Now we strive to contend and dispute with such; we are trying to lead away from their foolish persuasion to the truth those who have seized upon blood more easily than upon the words of the just. What, then? Shall we give up the work? Not at all. For if we shall not have been able to gain these from death toward which they are tending most eagerly, or to recall them from that devious path to life and light, since they themselves are repugnant to their salvation, we shall, however, strengthen our own whose purpose is not steadfast and fixed and established upon firm roots.

For very many are wavering, especially those who have had some acquaintance with literature. In this also the philosophers and orators and poets are pernicious, because they can easily ensnare minds that are not careful by suave speech and

² Ennius, *Annals* 272.

by the pleasant modulation of their verses as they run along. And for this reason I have wanted to join wisdom with religion, lest that teaching might be able to hinder anything for those studying vain things, and that the study of letters might now, not only not harm religion and justice, but even be of as much value to it as possible, if he who studies letters be the more instructed in virtues and wiser in truth. Besides, even if it were of value to no other person, this will certainly benefit me: my conscience will delight itself, and my mind will rejoice to be engaged in the light of truth, which is the food of the soul filled with a certain incredible pleasure.

But we must not lose hope. Perhaps 'we do not sing to deaf ears.'³ For things are not in such a bad condition that sane minds are lacking which delight in the truth and which see and follow the way pointed out to them as the right one. Only let the cup be smeared with the honey of heavenly wisdom, so that bitter remedies may be drunk by the imprudent without any offense, while the first sweetness in its attractiveness conceals the sharpness of the bitter taste under the cover of pleasantness.⁴ This reason is one of the first why the wise and learned people and the princes of this world do not place any sacred trust in the Scriptures; the fact that the prophets spoke the common and simple speech, as though they were speaking to the people. So they are despised by those who wish to hear nothing or to read nothing except what is polished and eloquent, nor can anything adhere to their minds unless it charms the ears with its very soothing sound. But those things which seem humble are thought to be old-womanish, foolish, vulgar. So they think nothing true except what is sweet to hear, nothing credible except that which can produce delight; no one weighs anything by its truth, but by its embellishment. They do not believe divine things, therefore, because they are without dye, but they do not believe even those who interpret these matters for them, because they, too, are

³ Vergil, *Eclogues* 10.8.

⁴ Cf. Lucretius, 1.936 ff.

either altogether unpolished and ignorant or, certainly, poorly instructed. For it hardly ever happens that they are quite eloquent, and the reason for this is evident. Eloquence serves the world; it flaunts itself before the people and strives to please even in evil things, since very often it attempts to attack the truth that it might show its strength; it seeks after wealth; it desires honors; and, finally, it demands the highest rank of dignity. It despises these things, therefore, as though lowly and base; it shrinks from the secrets as though opposed to itself, things which it would surely enjoy in public and desire in abundance. From this it comes about that wisdom and truth need suitable heralds.

And if by chance any of the erudite were converted to that truth, they did not measure up for its defense. Among those who are known to me, Minucius Felix⁵ was not of mean repute among the case-pleaders of the place. His book, which has the title *Octavius*, shows how suitable a defender of the truth he could have been if he had devoted himself entirely to that pursuit. Septimius Tertullian⁶ also was an expert in every sort of learning, but he had little ease in eloquence, was not polished, and was quite obscure. So, not even here did he come upon enough of renown. There was, however, one exceptional and brilliant one, Cyprian,⁷ because he had acquired great glory for himself in the profession of the art of oratory, and he wrote very many wonderful works in his own manner. For he had an ability in speaking, easy, fluent, pleasant, and, what is of prime importance in speech, it was clear, so that you cannot distinguish whether he was more ornate in eloquence, or more successful in explanation, or more powerful in persuasion. Still, he is not able to please beyond the words spoken

5 Minucius Felix is sometimes regarded as the first of the Christian Latin apologists because his *Octavius* is so slightly flavored with Christian arguments and allusions.

6 Tertullian is the great Father of Western Apologists even though he himself left the Church. Some authorities hold that he wrote before Minucius Felix.

7 St. Cyprian, another forerunner of Lactantius, a Christian, an African, a Latin apologist, died a martyr's death in 257.

to those who do not know the mystery, since the things which he spoke are mystical matters and were prepared for the purpose of being heard by the faithful alone. In fact, he is usually derided by the learned ones of this age to whom his writings have become known. I heard a certain man, quite well-spoken, too, who called him Coprian, changing one letter, just as though he had conferred that exquisite ability, one suited for better things, upon old-womanish fables. Now if this happens to him whose eloquence is not unpleasant, what shall we think is to befall those whose speech is lean and unpleasing? They have been able to possess no force of persuasiveness, nor subtlety in argument, nor any sharpness at all for refutation.

Chapter 2

Therefore, because there have been wanting among us suitable trained and skilled teachers who would vehemently and keenly refute public errors, who would defend the whole cause of truth in a dignified way and fluently, this very penury has called forth certain people to dare to write against the truth that is not known to them. I do not mean those who in former times have railed against it to no avail. When I was invited to teach oratory in Bithynia, and it so happened that at the same time the temple of God was overthrown, there arose in the same place two men who insulted truth thus prostrated and abject, and I know not whether it was more scornfully or more importunately done. One of these¹ professed to be a leading figure in philosophy, but he was so full of vice that, as a master of continence, he burned no less with avarice than with wanton desires; he was so sumptuous in food that the assertor of virtue in school, the lauder of parsimony and poverty, dined worse in the palace than at home.

¹ It seems that the name is not known. Baronius in his *Annales Ecclesiastici* II.853 thought that Lactantius meant Porphyrius here, but this opinion has been refuted by Holstenius, *De vita et scriptis Porphyrii* (1630) p. 89.

He covered over his vices, however, by hair and the pallium and, that which is the most effective veiling, by riches; and in order to increase these he gained access by a strange manner of canvassing to the friendship of judges, and he quickly obligated them to himself by the influence of a false name, not only to sell or betray their judgments, but also to retard by their power their neighbors and relatives from seeking back their own. But this man who destroyed the value of his disputations by his mode of life, or who censured his morals by his discussions, was himself a grave censor and a very severe accuser against himself. And at the very same time in which a just people were being harassed, he spewed forth three books against the Christian religion and name.

He professed that 'before all things the duty of a philosopher was to undermine the errors of men and to recall them to the true way, that is, to the worship of the gods by whose power and majesty the world is governed, and not to allow unskilled men to be ensnared by the deceits of certain others, lest their simplicity be a prize and grist for the mill of clever men. So he had undertaken this duty worthy of philosophy, to hold forth the light of wisdom to those not seeing it, not only that they might grow sound again by undertaking the worship of the gods, but also to avoid with strong obstinacy the fixed tortures of the body and not to want to endure the severe lacerations of their members in vain.' But in order that it might be clear that he had put forth that work for this reason, he was used up on the praises of princes whose piety and providence, as, indeed, he himself used to say, 'has shone forth brightly both in other respects and especially in defending the religions of the gods, and finally it was for the good of human interests that all men, laying aside and restraining impious and old-womanish superstition, should be free for legitimate practices and should experience the propitiousness of the gods toward them.'²

² The editors of the text consider this material as a quotation; still, the source has not been discovered as yet.

However, when he wished to weaken the reasonableness of that religion against which he was making a harangue, he appeared foolish, empty, ridiculous, because that serious consultant of the utility of another's practice did not know, not only what he was opposing, but even what he was saying. For if any of ours were present, although they were drowsy because of the time, they mocked him in spirit, however, as is natural, when they saw the man professing that he would illumine others, although he himself was blind; that he would lead others back from error, although he himself did not know where he was placing his own feet; that he would instruct others unto truth, not even a spark of which he had ever seen, although, in fact, as professor of wisdom he was making an effort to conquer wisdom. However, all were complaining of that, because at that time, especially, he was advancing toward that part of the work where hateful cruelty was raging. What a philosophical flatterer and time-server! Truly, this one was despised for his own emptiness; he was one who hoped for glory which he did acquire, and the glory which he did take hold of was changed into blame and reprehension.

Another one,³ of a stinging manner, wrote the same kind of material. He was, then, of the number of the judges and was one of the first instigators of persecution. Not content with that crime, he also pursued those whom he had afflicted with his writings. He composed two pamphlets, not against the Christians, lest he seem to inveigh against them in the manner of an enemy, but for the Christians, that he might be thought to show human regard for them and in a kindly way. In these he tried so to reveal falsity in Sacred Scripture that it seemed as though it were entirely contrary to itself. For certain chapters or topics which seemed to contradict themselves, he exposed, enumerating so many and such internal points of detail that, at times, he seems to have been of the same training. If this were the case, what Demosthenes will be able to defend him from a charge of impiety who became the betrayer of the

³ This is very probably Hierocles. Cf. *The Deaths of the Persecutors* 16.4.

religion for which he had been enkindled, and of the faith whose name he had put on, and of the sacrament which he had received? Unless, we say by chance, the sacred writings fell into his hands. What rashness was it, then, to dare to explain that which no one had interpreted for him? It is well, because either he learned nothing, or he understood nothing. Repugnance or contradiction is as far away from the sacred writings as he was away from faith and truth. He especially railed at 'Peter and Paul and the other disciples as though they were disseminators of fallacy, and he charged that they were rude and unlearned because certain ones of them had made a living from fishing,'⁴ just as though he took it hard that some Aristophanes or Aristarchus did not comment on that religion.⁵

Chapter 3

The desire of pretending and cleverness, then, were missing from these writers because they were untrained. What uneducated person can feign things apt and coherent with each other, when the most learned of the philosophers, Plato and Aristotle and Epicurus and Zeno, themselves, have said things that were repugnant and contrary to each other? This is the nature of liars, that they cannot agree. But the tradition of those, because it is true, stands four-square, and completely harmonizes with itself on all sides, and, therefore, it is persuasive since it is based upon constant reason. Not, then, for the sake of inquiry or of usefulness have they commented upon that religion; men who have, in fact, followed that way of life, both by precepts and by the very practice of it (a life which lacks pleasures and spurns all those things which are regarded as goods), and who have not only undergone death for the faith, but have even known that they would die and

⁴ Again this is an apparent quotation from the works discussed.

⁵ Ironically, Lactantius indicates that such empty charge-makers would accept references in comic writers as preferable to Christian sources.

have foretold that, afterwards, all who followed their training would suffer harsh and wicked treatment.

He asserted that 'Christ Himself, put to flight by the Jews, had carried on robberies by collecting a force of nine hundred men.' Who would dare to refute such great authority? Let us believe this surely, for perhaps in his dreams some Apollo announced it to him. Always so many robbers have perished and do daily perish—indeed, you yourself have condemned many; who of them after his death was called, I shall not say a god, but a man? But you, perhaps, believed it from this, since you have come to consider Mars, the homicide, holy, a god. You would not have done this, however, if the Areopagites had suspended him on a cross. When that same writer was destroying the marvelousness of His deeds, but yet was not denying them, he wanted to show that 'Appollonius had done like works or even greater.' Strange that he passed by Apuleius whose many marvelous deeds are accustomed to be related. Why, then, O madman, does no one reverence Appollonius as a god? Unless, perhaps, it is you alone, worthy of that god, to be sure, with whom the true God will punish you everlastingly.

If Christ was a magician because He performed miracles, then, surely, Appollonius, who, as you relate, 'when Domitian wished to punish him, did not appear at the trial all of a sudden,' was more skilled than He who was arrested and fastened to a cross. But from this very matter, perhaps, he wanted to make the charge of the insolence of Christ, the fact that He set Himself up as God, and that that one seems to have been the more reverent who, although he did the greater things, as this one thinks, still did not arrogate that dignity to himself. I am not going to take time now to compare those very works, since I have spoken in the second book¹ and in the preceding book² about the fraud and sleight-of-hand tricks of magic art.

I hold that there is not anyone who does not desire that

¹ c. 16.

² cc. 13,27.

there will befall him after death, first of all, that which even the mightiest kings long for. For why do men prepare great sepulchres for themselves, why statues, images? Why do they desire to gain renown in the minds of men by some famous deeds or even death undergone for the people? Why did you yourself wish to set up this detestable monument of your genius, fashioned from folly as though from the mire, unless it be because you hope for immortality from the memory of your name? It is foolish to think that Appollonius did not want that which he was desiring certainly, if it were possible, since there is no one who would refuse immortality, especially when you say that 'he was adored by certain people as a god, and that his shrine under the name of Hercules Alexicacus was set up by the Ephesians and is even now honored.' He could not, then, be believed a god after his death, since it was certain that he was a man and a magician, and, therefore, he affected divinity by the title of the name of another, since he was not able to, nor did he dare to by his own. But our Lord was able to be believed a God, since He was not a magician, and He was believed, since He truly was God. 'I do not say this,' he says, 'that on this account Appollonius is not regarded as a god, because he did not wish it, but that it might be apparent that we, who have not immediately joined to marvelous deeds the faith of divinity, are wiser than you who have believed in a god on the strength of slight portents.'

It is not strange if you, who are far removed from the wisdom of God, understand nothing of the materials which you have read, when the Jews, who from the beginning perused the prophets to whom the mystery³ of God had been entrusted, were, nevertheless, ignorant of what they were reading. Get to know, then, and understand, if you have any mind at all, that He is believed a God by us, not for this reason, that He performed miracles, but that we have seen that in Him were fulfilled all the things that were foretold to us by the preach-

³ The word is again *sacramentum*, and here it means the secret or hidden teachings about God.

ing of the prophets. He did miraculous things: we would have thought Him a magician, just as you think now and as the Jews thought then, if all the prophets had not foretold those very deeds in the one strain. And so we believe Him God, not more because of His marvelous deeds and works than because of that very cross which you touch like dogs, since that, too, was foretold at the same time. Not, therefore, by His own testimony—for who can be believed when he is speaking of himself?—but by the testimony of the prophets, who told about all the things which He did and suffered long beforehand, did He receive the acknowledgment of faith in His divinity which could not happen to Appollonius or Apuleius or any of the magicians, nor can it ever happen to anyone.

Then, when he had poured out such mad ravings of his ignorance, when he had endeavored with all his might to completely destroy the truth, he dared to label his nefarious books and enemies of God as *Philaletheis* (truth-loving). Blind heart! Mind, blacker than the Cimmerian shadows,⁴ as they say! Perhaps this one should have been a disciple of Anaxagoras to whom the snows were darkness. It is the same blindness to put the name of falsity on the true and that of truth on the false. A crafty man, of course, may wish to conceal his wolf nature under a sheep skin so as to be able to ensnare a reader with a fallacious title. But let it be that you have done this through ignorance, not malice. What truth did you finally bring to us, except that as an assertor of the gods, you betrayed them to the last? For pursuing the praises of the 'Supreme God' whom you admitted to be 'the King, the Greatest, the Maker of things, the Source of good, the Parent of all, the Maker and Sustainer of all the living,' you took the kingdom from your Jupiter, and when he was thus removed from supreme power, you reduced him into the number of ministers. So your epilogue convicts you of folly and vanity and error. For you affirm that there are gods, and yet you subject them

4 The Cimmerioi were a fabulous people who lived in caves between Baiae and Cumae, the home of sleep.

and put them in bondage to the God whose religion you are attempting to overthrow.

Chapter 4

When these men about whom I have been speaking released their sacrilegious writings in my presence and to my grief, spurred on by their proud impiety and by a knowledge of the truth itself and, as I believe, by God, I undertook this duty of refuting, with all the powers of my ability, the betrayers of justice. I would write not against those who would be crushed by a few words, but I would strike down all who anywhere and everywhere perform or have performed the same kind of work with one attack. For I do not doubt that many others in many areas, and not only in Greek but also in Latin, have devised monuments of their injustice. Since I could not answer each one of these individually, I thought I should press this cause, so as to overthrow the earlier ones with their works on the one hand, and remove from those to come all chance of writing or making an answer. Let them just lend an ear: I will surely bring it about that whoever learns those things will either take up what he condemned before, or, what is next best, he will, at any rate, cease to deride.

Although Tertullian handled the same material fully in that book called *The Apology*; however, because it is one thing to make answer to accusers, which consists in defense or negation alone, and another to give instruction (which we are doing) which must contain the substance of all of doctrine,¹ I did not shrink from this task, so that I might complete the material which Cyprian did not reach in that work² in which, as he himself says, he tries to refute Demetrianus' 'barking and roaring against' the truth.

He did not use his material as he should have, for not by

¹ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* VI.8.6.

² Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum*, c. 1.

the testimonies of the Scriptures which that one thought of as empty, fictitious, deceitful, was he to have been refuted, but by argumentation and reason. Since he was arguing with a man without knowledge of the truth, he should have put aside the sacred writings for a little while, and he ought to have trained him from the beginning as though he were untutored, and then shown him the principles of the Light, little by little, lest he become blinded by being confronted with all the Light at once. For just as an infant is not to take the strength of solid, heavy food because of the tenderness of its stomach, and is nourished on soft food and milk until his organs are strengthened and he is able to feed on stronger foods, so it was necessary for him, too, because he was not yet capable of understanding the divine teachings, to be presented first with human testimonies, namely, those of the philosophers and writers of histories, so that he might receive very compelling refutation from his own authorities. Since Cyprian in his exceeding fluency in the Scriptures did not act that way, and since he was content in their authority alone on which the faith rests, I have attempted, with God's inspiration, to do just that, and at the same time to prepare the way for others to imitate the plan. And if by our encouragement, learned and cultured men should begin to come our way and want to cast their genius and power of speaking on this field of the truth, no one should doubt that the false religions will vanish in a short time and all philosophy fall, if all are persuaded of the fact that this is the only religion and that it is also the only true wisdom. But I have digressed longer than I intended.

Chapter 5

Now we must set forth our proposed discussion about justice: whether this is itself the greatest virtue or whether it is the very source of virtue. Not only the philosophers have

sought this out, but the poets also who were much earlier and were regarded as wise men before the name of philosophy originated. They clearly understood that this justice was far removed from human matters, and they depicted it as, offended with the vices of men, having left the earth and passed into the heavens. And in order to teach what it means to live justly—for they used to give instructions in the round-about manner of poetical disguise—they sought examples of justice from the age of Saturn which they call ‘golden,’ and they described the condition of human life when the world was in that age. Indeed, this must not be regarded as poetical fiction, but as truth. For while Saturn was reigning, and the cults of the false gods had not yet been begun, and that people had not as yet been given over to the idea of divinity, surely God was worshiped. For this reason, then, there were no dissensions, nor hatreds, nor wars. ‘Fury had not yet unsheathed the maddened swords,’ as Caesar Germanicus says in the Aratean poem, ‘nor had discord among relatives become known.’¹ In fact, there was not any even among strangers, nor were there any swords which would be bared. Who would have to take consideration about his own protection, as long as justice were present and flourishing, since no one would make any encroachments; or who would contrive for the ruin of another, since no one would covet anything?

‘They preferred to live content with slight worship,’² as Cicero tells us in his poem of the same title which belongs to our religious literature. ‘It was not right even to mark off or divide the fields with a measure; they sought from a central source,’³ for God had given the land in common to all, so that they might live a common life, not that grasping and raging greed might claim everything for itself, and that nothing would be lacking to anyone which came into existence for all. It is necessary that this saying of the poet be taken

1 Germanicus, *Aratus* 112,113.

2 Cicero, *Aratus* frg. 21.

3 Vergil, *Georgics* 1.126-127.

in such a way that we should not think that there was absolutely no private ownership at that time. Rather, we should interpret it as a poetic figure, that we may understand that men were so liberal that they did not exclude others from profits gained for themselves, nor did they in solitude brood upon hidden wealth, but they freely admitted the poor to a share of their proper work.

'Then the rivers were flowing with milk and with nectar.'⁴ And neither was this strange, since the facilities of the just were manifestly laid open to all; nor did avarice, intercepting the divine benefits, bring hunger and thirst upon the common people, but all enjoyed abundance equally, since those who had, gave bountifully and generously to those who had not.

But after Saturn was expelled by his son and brought into Latium, 'Fleeing the arms of Jove, and an exile deprived of his realm,'⁵ when the people had already ceased to worship God, either from fear of the new king, or depraved through their own fault, and had begun to regard the king as a god, although he himself, a near-parricide, was an example to the others for violating piety, 'The most just virgin speedily abandoned the earth,'⁶ but, it did not happen as Cicero says, that 'she tarried in the realm of Jupiter and in part of heaven.'⁷ For how could she tarry or reside in the kingdom of him who drove his father from his realm, persecuted him in war, and cast him out as an exile from the earth? 'That one added evil poison to the black snakes and bade the wolves to take prey,'⁸ that is, he inspired men with hatred and envy and deceit, so that they were as envenomed as snakes and rapacious as wolves. This is, indeed, what those people truly do who persecute those who are just and faithful to God, and who give to judges the power of raging furiously against the guiltless. Perhaps Jupiter did something of this sort for attacking and removing justice,

4 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.3.

5 Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.320.

6 Germanicus, *Aratus* 137.

7 Cicero, *Aratus* frg. 23.

8 Vergil, *Georgics* 1.129-130.

and for this he is said to have made snakes savage and to have incited wolves to brutality. 'Then the fury of war and the love of possessing followed,'⁹ and not without cause. For when the religion of God was taken away, they lost also the knowledge of good and evil. Thus community living perished among men, and the compact of human society was broken. Then, forces began to struggle against each other, and to plot, and gain glory for themselves at the price of human blood.

Chapter 6

The source of all of these evils was cupidity, and this certainly burst forth from the contempt of the true Majesty. For not only did they for whom there was some abundance not share with others, but they even took away the goods of others, drawing in all things unto their own private gain, and the things which individuals were working on before for the use of all were conferred upon the homes of the few. In order to subject the rest to slavery, firstly, they began to steal away and pile up the necessities of life and keep them tightly closed up, so that they might keep the celestial benefits their own, not on account of their kindly human nature which was not in them at all, but to rake up all things as instruments of their greed and avarice. They also passed laws for themselves and sanctioned, under the name of justice, those most unfair and unjust measures by which they protected their thefts and avarice against the strength of the multitude. Therefore, they availed as much by authority as by strength or resources or evil.

Since there was in them not a vestige of justice, the offices of which are humanity, fairness, pity, now they were rejoicing in proud and swollen unfairness, and they put themselves higher than the rest of men because of the train of their

⁹ *Ibid.*, *Aeneid* 8.327.

satellites and weapons and distinctive garb. Hence, they discovered for themselves honors, and the purple and axes,¹ so that they might rule over those they would strike with terror and fear, relying on the terrorizing power of their axes and swords as though upon the right of masters.

In this condition did that king² constitute human life, who, after his sire had been defeated and put to flight, seized not a kingdom but an impious tyranny by force of armed men. He took away that golden and just age and forced men to become evil and wicked from this very fact, that he turned them from God to adoring himself, which terror of most overweening power had wrung out from them. For who would not fear him whom arms encircled? Him whom the unusual flash of iron and swords surrounded? Or what stranger would he spare who had not even spared his own father? Whom would he fear who had overcome the strong, outstanding race of Titans in war, and had destroyed them by slaughtering them? Why is it strange if a whole multitude, oppressed with new fear, had yielded to the adulation of one? They venerated him. They conferred the greatest honor upon him. And since imitating the manners and vices of a king is judged to be a kind of flattery, they all cast aside reverence, lest they seem to reproach the king for his crimes if they lived reverently.

Thus, corrupted by this constant imitation, they abandoned the divine right and, little by little, the habit of evil living became the custom. And now nothing of the preceding age remained in its reverent and very fine condition, but justice having been exploded, took truth with it and left for men error, ignorance, and blindness. Not wisely, therefore, did the poets act who sang that justice fled to the kingdom of Jupiter. If justice was on the earth in that age which they call golden, then, surely, it was driven out by Jupiter who changed the golden age. Now the change of the golden age and the expul-

¹ Senators and magistrates wore a purple-bordered toga, and the axes borne by lictors signified the power of certain magistrates.

² Cf. Bk. I, ch. 10.

sion of justice must be considered, as I said, as nothing else than the desertion of the divine religion. For this alone brings it about that a man may hold his fellowman dear and know that he is bound to him with the bond of brotherhood, inasmuch as 'the same Father is God of all,'³ and that he may share the benefits of God, the common Father, with those who do not have them; that he may harm no one, oppress no one, not close his door to a guest-stranger, nor his ear to one entreating him; but that he may be 'bountiful, generous, liberal,' which Tully believed were 'kingly praises.'⁴ Actually, this is justice, and this the golden age, which was first corrupted in the reign of Jupiter, and then soon after, when he himself and all his progeny were consecrated by the worship of many gods which was then taken up, it had been entirely removed.

Chapter 7

But God, most indulgent parent that He is, when the end of time was drawing near, sent a messenger to lead back that old age and the justice that had been routed, so that the human race would not be thrown about by great and everlasting errors. The likeness of that golden time returned, therefore, and was given back to the earth, but justice was assigned only to a few. This justice is nothing else but a devoted and religious worship of the one God. Perhaps someone may be moved to ask why, if this is justice, it has not been given to the entire human race, and why all the people are not agreed upon it. This is a matter of great discussion; why separate selection was retained by God when He gave justice to the earth. I have brought this out in another place,¹ and wherever it shall come up opportunely, it will be explained. Now it is sufficient to note this very briefly, that virtue is not

³ Lucretius 2.992.

⁴ Cicero, *Speech for King Deiotarus* 9.26.

¹ Cf. Bk. II, ch. 17; III, ch. 29.

able to be discerned unless there be contrary vices, nor is it perfected unless it be exercised by adversity. God wished this distinction of good and evil to exist, that we might know the quality of the good from evil, and, likewise, that of evil from good; and, if one is removed, the reason of the other cannot be understood.

So God did not exclude evil in order that the condition of virtue might be able to stand firm. For how could patience retain its force or its name, if there were nothing which we were forced to suffer? How could faith vowed to its God merit praise, unless there were someone who wished to turn it aside from God? Therefore, He permitted the unjust to be more powerful, that they could force men unto evil; and for this reason they are the more numerous, so that virtue would be precious because it is rare. Even Quintilian put this very briefly and in an outstanding manner in an obscure chapter: 'For what virtue would innocence be,' he said, 'unless its rare occurrence had given it praise? But since it has been so worked out by nature that hatred, desire, wrath toward something which they have come upon should drive men blind, it seems to be beyond man's nature to be free from fault. But if nature had given equal emotions to all, piety would be nothing.'² How true this is the very demand of reason teaches. For if it is virtue to bravely resist evils and vices, it is clear that without evil and vice there is no virtue. And in order that God might make this absolute and perfect, He kept that which was contrary to it, with which it could contend. For shaken by shattering evils it acquires stability, and as often as it is struck against, so much does it gain in strength. Without a doubt, then, this cause brings it about that, although justice has been conferred upon men, yet it is not said to be a golden age, for it has not endured evil to retain the opposite which alone holds the guaranty of a divine religion.

² Cf. Quintilian's *Declamatio* according to Ritter's recension p. III note. This section is treated as a direct quotation from Quintilian by the Vienna editors.

Chapter 8

Those who think that no one is just have justice before their eyes, but they do not want to perceive her. Why is it that they describe her in songs or in every speech, complaining of her absence, although it would be very easy for them to be good if they should wish? Why do you depict justice to yourselves as something inane, and why do you wish it to drop from the sky as though fashioned in some likeness? Behold, it is present before you. Take it up, if you can, and place it in the dwelling place of your heart, and do not think it difficult or foreign to these times. Be fair and good, and the justice which you seek will follow you of its own accord. Put aside from your hearts all evil designs, and immediately that golden time will return for you, which you cannot attain in any other way than by beginning to worship the true God. Your desire for justice on earth can in no way be realized as long as the cult of false gods remains. It could not have been even then, when you think, that when those gods did not exist whom you worship impiously, there must have been the worship of one God throughout the earth. It was the worship of Him, to be sure, who punishes evil and demands goodness; whose temple is not of stones or clay, but man himself who bears a likeness of God; and this temple is adorned, not with corruptible presents of gold and gems, but with the everlasting gifts of virtues.

Learn, then, if there is any mind left in you, that men are bad and unjust for this reason, that the false gods are worshiped. And, therefore, all the evils in human affairs grow daily more serious, because God, the Maker and Governor of this world, has been abandoned; because unholy religions have been embraced against that which is right; and, finally, because you allow God to be not worshiped at all even, or only by a few. For if God alone were worshiped, there would not be dissensions and wars. When men would know that they were sons of the one God and, therefore, bound together

by a sacred, inviolable bond of divine relationship, no insidious plots would take place. When they knew what sort of punishments God was preparing for killers of souls, the God who sees through clandestine crimes and even thoughts themselves, there would not be frauds and rapine. If according to God's precept they had learned how to be content with what is their own and with a little,¹ so that they might prefer firm and eternal things to those fragile and falling, there would not be crimes of adultery, and incest, and prostitution. If it were known to all that whatever is sought after beyond the desire of procreating is condemned by God, necessity would not force woman to violate her honor to seek a most disgraceful living for herself, when men also would restrain passion, and a loving and religious coming together of those who have would come to the aid of those who have not. There would not be, therefore, as I said, all these evils upon the earth if all were pledged to the law of God; if there were done by all men what this one people of ours does.

How blessed and how golden would be the condition of human affairs if, throughout the whole world, meekness and devotion and peace and innocence and fairness and temperance and faith should tarry! Finally, then there would not be need of so many and such various laws for ruling men, when the one law of God would suffice unto perfect innocence. Nor would there be need of prisons or the swords of guards and the terror of punishments, when the healthfulness of the heavenly precepts infused into human hearts would instruct men willingly to the works of justice.

Now the evil are those who are in ignorance of the right and the good. Indeed, Cicero saw this. When he was treating of law, he said: 'Just as by one and the same nature the world coheres and supports itself, all its parts fitting among themselves, so all men, confused by nature, disagree among themselves through depravity. And they do not understand that they are relatives and subjected under the one same tutelage. But if this were grasped, men would surely live the life of

¹ Cf. Cicero, *On Duties* 1.21.70.

the gods.’² Therefore, all the evils with which the human race weakens itself in turn, have been brought on by the unjust and unholy worship of the false gods. For they could not retain piety who had denied as perfidious and rebel children the common Father of us all, God.

Chapter 9

Sometimes, however, they realize that they are evil, and they praise the condition of former times and infer that justice is not present because of their conduct and deserts. But even though it is before their eyes, they not only do not take it up, but they do not even acknowledge it; in fact, they even hate it violently and persecute it and strive to exterminate it. For a while now let us pretend that this is not justice which we seek. How, if that should come which they think is true, shall they receive it? Since, if the torturers and killers of men whom they confess to be imitators of the just, just because they do good and just works, killed only the evil, they would be worthy men to whom justice would not be coming, there was no other cause for justice to leave the earth than the shedding of human blood. How much more should this be so when they kill the reverent, and regard the very followers of justice as enemies, as more than enemies, I should say? Although they seek after their souls and their resources and their children with fire and sword, still they spare them when they are conquered, and there is place for clemency among their arms. Or if it please them to be merciless, then nothing more is done to them except that they are killed or carried off into slavery. This is unrecountable, however, because it is done against those who do not know how to do evil, and none are regarded as more harmful than those who are innocent of all harm.

The most wicked men, therefore, who surpass the wild beasts

² Cicero, *On Laws* frg. 1.

in their fierceness, who ravage the most placid flock of the Lord, 'wolves, or prowlers in the black darkness, who are driven blind by a wicked craving of their belly,'¹ dare to make mention of justice. But, in truth, not a craving of the belly but of the heart has made them wild. They do not go about in the black darkness but in open plundering. Nor does a consciousness of crime ever call them back, lest they violate the sacred and holy name of justice with that mouth which drips, as if it were the gaping jaws of wild beasts, with the blood of the innocent.

Should we say most strongly that there is a cause for this hatred which is so great and so persistent? Is it that 'truth begets hatred,'² as the poet says, filled as though with a divine inspiration? Or do they blush to be vile before the good and just? Or is it for both reasons? The truth is always hated for this reason, that he who sins wishes to have a free place for sinning, and he thinks that he can enjoy this delight of evil-doers more securely in no other way than if there is no one to whom his crimes are not pleasing. Therefore, they strive to extirpate completely those witnesses of their crimes and malice and to remove those whom they think opposed to themselves as though their lives were proved guilty. For why are some good people unsuitable who make a loud outcry against corrupt public morals by living well? Why are not all equally evil, grasping, unchaste, adulterous, perjurious, greedy, fraudulent? Rather, let those be removed from us before whom it is a shame to live badly, men who strike the face of those who sin even though not with words, because they are silent, yet still reprove them by their dissimilar kind of life. For whoever does not agree seems to chastize. And this is not to be greatly wondered at if they do those things against men, since even against God Himself for the same reason the people rose up, a people also established in hope and not ignorant of God. The same inevitableness which violated the very author of

1 Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.355.

2 Cf. Terence, *Andria* 1.1.40.

justice follows the just. They harass, therefore, and torture with exquisite kinds of punishments, and hold it a slight thing to kill those whom they hate, except that the cruelty also ridicules and wastes their bodies. If there are some who through fear of pain or death, or through their own perfidy, turn away from the heavenly promise and show approval of those deadly sacrificial acts, they praise them and load them with honors, so that they might entice others by their example. But they overwhelm with all the powers of their murderousness, those who have valued their faith highly and have not denied that they were worshipers of God, just as though they thirst for blood, and they call them desperate because they do not spare their bodies at all, as though anything could be more desperate than to torture and hack him whom you know to be innocent. So there is no shame left in those from whom all humanity has gone, and arguments that fit themselves they twist against just men.

For they call impious those who are certainly pious and who keep away from human blood. If, however, they should consider their own actions and the actions which they condemn as impious, they would understand how deceitful their own are and how much more deserving of all those things which they say and do against the good. For not from our number, but from theirs, do those always arise who with arms block the roads; practice piracy on the seas; and if not permitted to go about openly, they mix poisons secretly; who kill their wives to gain their dowries, or their husbands to wed adulterers; who strangle their children when they are born, or if they are overly 'pious,' they expose them; who do not refrain from lust or incest either with a daughter or a sister or mother or a priestess; who conspire against their fellow-citizens and their country; who do not fear the sack; who, finally, commit sacrileges and despoil the temples of the gods whom they worship. And, that we may mention the deeds which are trivial and usual, they take inheritances, forge wills, take away or exclude just heirs. They are those who prostitute their bodies for

pleasure; who, unmindful of why they have been born, contend with woman in submission to lust; who defile and profane the most sacred part of their bodies against all right; who measure their manliness with a sword; and what is more disgraceful that they may be high-priests of religion, they do not spare even their life, but sell their souls to be publicly extinguished. If they sit as judges, either they destroy the guiltless because they have been corrupted by bribe, or they let the guilty go unpunished. They also reach for the sky itself by their magic, as though the earth might not contain their malice. These crimes, I tell you, and more than these are done by those who worship the gods.

What is the place of justice among these, so many and such great crimes? And I gathered together a few from the many, not to make an accusation of them, but to illustrate my point. Whoever wishes to know them all may take in hand the books of Seneca, who was a very true describer and a very sharp railer of public habits and vices. But even Lucilius as well has circumscriptly and briefly depicted that shady life in these verses:

Now in truth from morning until night, on feast day and the days before, the entire populace, and equally the patricians every day, all display themselves in the market place and never leave it. And they all devote themselves to the one same desire and skill: that they may give words cautiously, fight guilefully, strive with flattery, simulate that they are good men, and perform trickery, as if all were enemies to all.³

What one of these can be cast against our people, whose whole religion is to live without crime and stain? When, therefore, they see that they and their own associates are doing those things which we mentioned, and that our people practice nothing else but what is fair and good, they would be able, if they had any sense, to learn from this that those who do these things are the pious, and that those who commit the crimes are the impious. For it is not possible that those who

³ From an uncertain work of Lucilius, frg. 4.

do not err in all the actions of their life should be mistaken in that which is most important, that is, in religion, which is the head of all. Impiety taken up in that which is the greatest concern would follow in all the rest. And it cannot justly be that those who err in all of life should not be deceived in religion also, since piety, keeping the rule in the highest matter, would preserve its tenor in the others. So it happens that in each way it is learned from the condition of the things which are done what sort of highest concern there is.

Chapter 10

It is worth attention to learn of their piety, that from those who act mercifully and reverently, it may be understood what kind of things are they which are done by them against the rights of piety. And so that I may not seem to be inclement in railing against anyone, I will take some poetic character, which may be even a very great example of piety. According to Maro, 'that king, than whom no other was more just, nor was anyone greater in piety, in war, and in arms,'¹ showed us what examples of justice? 'He had bound behind their backs the hands of those whom he was to send to the shades below, about to sprinkle the flames with the blood of the slain.'²

What can be more holy than this piety; what more clement than to immolate human victims to the dead and to feed the flame with the blood of men as though with oil?

But perhaps this was not his own vice, but that of the poet who defiled 'a man signed with piety'³ with the mark of crime. Where, then, poet, is that piety which you very often praise? Lo, reverent Aeneas 'seizes the four youths begotten of Sulmo, and just as many of those whom Ufens is bringing up; he takes them alive that he may immolate them to the

¹ Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.544-545.

² *Ibid.*, 11.81-82.

³ *Ibid.*, 1.10.

shades and sprinkle the flames of the funeral pile with captive blood.⁴ Why, then, did he say at that very same time in which he was sending bound men to immolation: 'Indeed, I would want to be yielding to the living,'⁵ when the living, whom he had in his power, he ordered to be slain in place of beasts?

But this, as I said, was not his fault, who perhaps had not learned letters, but yours. For although you had been trained, you did not know what piety was, and that very thing which that hero did nefariously, detestably, you believed to be the function of piety. Of course, on this one score he is called 'pious,' that he loved his father. What of the fact that 'good Aeneas destroyed those praying for what was not to be despised'?⁶ Swearing by that same father and the 'hope of Iulus then growing up,'⁷ he spared not at all when 'stirred up by fury and wrath.'⁸ Will anyone think, therefore, that this man had any virtue in him, who burned with fury as though he were stubble, and who, forgetting the shade of his father through whom he was besought, could not bridle his wrath? He was 'pious,' then, in no way who killed not only those not resenting it, but even those making supplication to him.

Someone will say at this point: 'What, therefore, is piety, or where is it, or what sort of quality is it?'⁹ Surely, it rests with those who know not wars, who preserve harmony with all, who are friendly even to the unfriendly, who love all men as brothers, who know how to restrain wrath and to quell all fury of mind with tranquil moderation. How much smoke, and the clouds of how much darkness and error have darkened how many hearts of men who, when they think themselves especially pious, then, especially, do they become impious? The more religiously they do reverence to those earthly shrines, so much the more crime-laden do they rise up against the name

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.516-519.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.111.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.106.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.523.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.946.

⁹ It is difficult to find a good English word for *pietas*. Piety, especially in its usual meaning, is not adequate.

of true Divinity. And so often in payment of their impiety they are vexed with even graver evils. Because they are not aware of their cause, the whole blame is ascribed to fortune, and the philosophy of Epicurus finds place, that nothing affects the gods as judges, that they are neither touched by favor nor moved by wrath, because they see their despisers are often the happy ones and their worshipers are miserable.¹⁰

And this happens, since, when they seem to be religious and good by nature, they are believed to merit nothing comparable to what they often suffer. They console themselves, then, with the accusation against fortune, but they do not believe that, because if there were any fortune, she would never harm those devoted to her.

Rightly, therefore, does punishment follow piety of this sort, and divinity, offended with the evil crimes of falsely religious men, pursues them with dire calamity. Though these may live lives morally sound in the greatest faith and innocence, because, however, they worship false gods whose impious and profane rites the true God hates, they are alien to justice and the name of true piety.

Nor is it difficult to show why those worshipers of the gods cannot be good and just. For how will they abstain from blood who cherish those bloody gods, Mars and Bellona? How will they spare their parents who worship Jupiter, the expeller of his father; or how will they care for infants born of them who revere Saturn? How will they protect modesty who worship a nude goddess, an adulteress, and the prostitute, as it were, among the gods? How will they abstain from rapine and fraud who know that those who teach that the thefts of Mercury are not acts of fraud but of cleverness are deceiving? How will they restrain their concupiscence who venerate Jupiter, Hercules, Liber, Apollo, and the others whose adulteries and outrages upon men and women are known, not only to the learned, but are portrayed even in the theaters and sung about, so that they might become more known to all? Are men able to be just in

¹⁰ Cf. *Selected Opinions of Epicurus*, edited by Usener, Vol. I, p. 71,394.

the presence of these things, who, although they are good by nature, are, however, instructed unto injustice by the very gods? For it is necessary to please the god you worship with those things in which you know he takes joy and delight. Thus it happens that a god forms the life of his devotees according to the quality of his own deity, since imitation is the most religious form of worship.

Chapter 11

To those men, therefore, who conform to the customs of their gods, because it is serious and bitter justice, and who violently exercise against the just the same 'piety' which they use in other matters, not without reason has the name beasts been given by the prophets.¹ Thus Marcus Tullius in an outstanding passage says: 'If there is no one who would not prefer to die rather than to be turned into some form of beast, even though he would hold the mind of man, how much more wretched is it to be in the shape of man with a mind that is wild? Indeed, it seems to me to be as much the worse evil as the soul is more noble than the body.'² And so the bodies of beasts are spurned, by which those are more wild, and yet they are pleasing to themselves because they have been born men of whom they have nothing except the external features and the figure in general. For what Caucasus, what India, what Hyrcanian region ever sustained beasts so wild, so bloody?³ Because the madness of all the wild beasts rages only up to the satiety of their hunger, and when that has been abated, then immediately there is rest. That one, that is the true beast by whose one command 'Black blood is everywhere spilled, and everywhere cruel mourning, everywhere dread, and many an image of death.'⁴

¹ Cf. Ezech. 34.25,28.

² From an uncertain work, frg. 66. Cf. however, *The Republic* 4.1.1.

³ Cf. Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.366-367.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.646; 2.368-369.

No one is able to describe rightly the wantonness of this so great monster which rages with its fierce fangs over the whole world though it lies in one place, and which not only scatters the limbs of men, but even reduces the very bones and grinds them to ashes, lest there be any place of burial. Just as though those who confess God were striving for this, that He should come to their sepulchres, and not that they come to God. What fierceness, then, is that, what fury, what madness to deny light to the living and earth to the dead? I say, therefore, that there is nothing more miserable than those men whom necessity has found or has made the ministers of another's fury, the satellites of an impious order. For that was not honor nor an advance in dignity, but the condemnation of a man to the work of execution, in fact, to the everlasting punishment of God. What those individuals have done throughout the whole world it is impossible to tell. What number of volumes will hold such infinite, such varied kinds of cruelty? For once power was gained, each one raged according to his own habits. Some, in the presence of excessive timidity, dared more than they were ordered; others gave vent to a personal hatred against the just; certain ones acted according to a natural wildness of spirit; some, to show favor and to fortify the way for themselves to higher offices by means of this one. Some stood out with a leaning to slaughter, as did the one in Phrygia who burned up an entire people along with the assembly itself.

But the more bitter one is, so much the more clement is he found: that is truly the worst kind which a false species of clemency flatters, and that one is the more severe; that one is the crueler executioner who has decided to kill no one. And so it cannot be said how great and what serious kinds of torments judges of this sort have contrived in order to attain an effect of their purpose. But they do these things, however, not only that they may boast that they have destroyed no innocent person—for I myself have heard some glorying in the fact that their ministry was bloodless in this regard—but also for the sake of envy, so that they themselves may not be over-

come, or that the others may not attain to the glory of their virtue. So in thinking out the kinds of punishments, they think of nothing other than victory, for they know that it is a struggle and a fight. I saw in Bithynia a guard, marvelously elated with joy, as though he had subjected some barbarous nation, because one who had resisted with great courage for a period of two years seemed at last to be giving in.

They strive, therefore, to conquer, and they inflict exquisite pains on bodies, and they shun nothing other than that the tortured must not die, as though, indeed, the death alone would make them blessed and not the torments also, which the more serious they bring forth so much the greater glory of virtue. But they, stubborn in their foolishness, order care to be diligently applied to the tortured, so that their manners may be renewed for other torments and that new blood may be prepared for punishment. What can be done so pious, so beneficial, so human? They would not have cared so solicitously for those whom they loved. This is the training of their gods; for these works they instruct their worshipers; they desire these sacred rites. Why, even the most defiled homicides have heaped impious rights against the pious: for sacrilegious constitutions also and the disputations of those skilled in the law are read as unjust. Domitius, in the seventh book on the office of proconsul, collected the nefarious rescripts of princes in order to show with what punishments those who professed that they were worshipers of God should be punished.⁵

Chapter 12

What would you do to those who call the butcheries of those ancient tyrants, raging madly against innocent people, a right? And although they are teachers of injustice and cruelty, yet they wish to seem just and prudent. They are blind and dull

⁵ Cf. Rudorff, "Über den liber de officio proconsulis" *Acta Academiae Berol.* 1865 (ed. 1866) p. 259 ff.

and ignorant of the truth of things. Is justice, then, so hateful to you, O depraved minds, that you equate it with the worst crime? Is innocence so lost among you that you judge it worthy, not even of a simple death, but that it is regarded beyond all crimes to admit no crime and to show a heart free from all contagion of evil? And since we are speaking in common with the worshipers of the false gods, it may be permitted by you to do something well with you. This is our law, this our work, this our religion. If we seem wise to you, imitate us; if fools, condemn us, or even ridicule if you wish. But our folly is of advantage to you. Why do you torture us, why afflict us? We do not envy your wisdom. We prefer this folly; we embrace it. We believe that this is for our benefit, that we love you and bestow all things upon you who hate. There is a place in Cicero not averse to the truth in that discussion which is delivered by Furius against justice: 'Suppose there are two, one of whom, a very fine man, very fair, of the highest justice, and singular faith, but the other of marked evil and daring, and that the state is in this error that it considers that good man evil, crime-laden, wicked; but on the other hand, he who is most evil it thinks possesses the most upright probity of morals and faith. And according to this opinion of all the citizens is that good man bothered and attacked, his hands taken from him, his eyes dug out. And it is thus that he is condemned, bound, consumed and left destitute and finally made to seem most wretched in the eyes of all even by strict right. And, then that evil man is praised, cultivated, loved by all. They confer all honors upon him, full commands, all resources, troops from all sides. Then shall he be judged by the opinion of all as the best man and most worthy of all good fortune. Who, then, will be so mad who would hesitate as to which of these he would prefer to be?'¹ Surely, as though he were divining what evils were going to come about for us and in what way, he set forth this example. For our people suffer all these things because of the evil of those who are in error.

¹ Cicero, *Republic* 3.17.27.

Indeed, the state, rather the whole world, is in the error to such a degree that it persecutes, tortures, condemns, and kills just men as though they were evil and impious. As to his saying that no one is so mad as to doubt what he prefers himself to be, indeed, that one, who was disputing about justice, realized this, that a wise man would prefer to be evil with a good reputation than good with an evil one. May this madness be far from us, to prefer the false to the true! Will the quality of our goodness depend on the errors of the people rather than upon our own consciences and the judgment of God? Or will any good fortune ever inveigle us into not choosing goodness with all evils rather than falsity with all its prosperity? 'Let kings have their realms and the rich their wealth,'² as Plautus says, and let the prudent keep their prudence. Let them leave us our folly which, from the very fact that they envy us for it, is manifestly wisdom. Who would envy a fool unless he himself were a consummate fool? They, however, are not such fools as to envy fools, but from the fact that they carefully, zealously carry on the persecutions, they grant that we are not fools. Why would they rage so fiercely unless it were that they fear that, with justice growing stronger every day, they might be left with their precious gods? If, then, the adherents of those gods are wise and we the fools, why do they fear that the wise will be seduced by the fools?

Chapter 13

And since, then, our number is always increased from the worshipers of the false gods, never lessened, however, not even in persecution itself—because men can sin and be defiled by false worship, but cannot be turned away from God: for truth avails by its own power—who is so stupid and so blind but that he sees there is wisdom in each aspect? They are blinded

² Plautus, *Curculio* 1.3.22.

by malice and fury, though, lest they see, and they think those fools who, although they have it in their power to escape punishments, prefer to be tortured and to die, when they are able to see from this very fact that that is no folly upon which so many thousands of men throughout the whole world are of unanimous opinion. For if women fall because of the weakness of their sex—sometimes they call it a ‘womanly’ or ‘old womanish’ superstition—certainly the men know what they are about. If children, if the young are improvident because of their age, surely the mature and the old have stable judgment. If one city loses sensibleness, innumerable others cannot certainly play the fool. If one province, one nation lacks prudence, all the rest of necessity must have knowledge of the right. Since, therefore, from the rising of the sun unto its going down, the divine law has been taken up and both sexes, every age and tribe and region serve God with one like spirit; and since everywhere there is the same patience, the same contempt of death, they had better understand that there is something of reason in that which is defended even unto death not without cause. They should realize that there is something of firmness and solidity which not only does not free that religion from injuries and vexation, but even increases it and makes it stronger by them. In this, too, their malice is refuted, because they think that they have completely overturned the religion of God if they have defiled men, although it is possible to make satisfaction to God and there is no one so bad a worshiper of God that, when the chance is given, he does not return to God’s grace, and, indeed, with greater devotion. For the consciousness of sin and the fear of punishment make one more religious, and faith is always much stronger which repentance has recovered. If, then, they believe that their gods are placated by sacrifices and pleasant odors, when they think they are angry with them, why is it that they think our God so unyielding, so implacable, that one who has been forced against his will to offer sacrifices to their gods could no longer be a Christian? Unless, perhaps, they

think that once men have been contaminated they will change their very souls so that they begin now to do of their own accord what they made them do under torments. Who would willingly execute that duty which started from an injury? When one sees the scars of his side, will he not hate the more those gods on account of whom he will bear everlasting marks of his punishments and scars branded on his body?

So it comes about that, when peace has been divinely restored, all those who have fled return and, on account of the miracle of virtue, another new people comes to the fold. For when the crowd sees men lacerated by various kinds of torments holding on to unconquered patience before executioners, they know that which is the fact, that the harmony and the patience of so many dying people is not vain, nor could the patience itself overcome such great suffering without God. Robbers and men of robust strength cannot endure lacerations of this sort; they cry out and groan; they are overcome with pain, because inspired patience is lacking to them. But among us—and I will not speak of the men—children even and frail women silently vanquish their torturers, nor was fire able to extract a groan from them. Let the Romans go and glory in a Mucius¹ or a Regulus.² The one handed himself over to the enemy to be killed because he was ashamed to live as a captive. The other, seized by the enemy, when he saw that he could not avoid death put his hand into the fire to satisfy for his crime to the enemy whom he wished to kill, and he gained thereby the pardon which he had not merited. Lo, the weak sex and fragile age suffer laceration of the whole body and burning, not of necessity, because they could avoid it if they wished, but of will, because they trust in God.³

This is real courage which the philosophers also, glorying

1 Mucius Scaevola (left-handed) boldly held his right hand in the fire to show his courage to the enemy.

2 Regulus returned to Rome on a Carthaginian embassy and did not hesitate to go back to Carthage and certain death, that he might keep his word.

3 Many early Christian apologists treat of these topics. Cf. for instance, Minucius Felix, c. 37.3-5.

not in the thing but in vain words, boast of, prating that there is nothing so befitting the gravity and constancy of a wise man as to be able to be driven from his opinion and purpose by no terrors, and that it is of such great worth to be tortured and to die so as not to betray faith or leave a duty or do anything unjust through compulsion by fear of death or bitter pain. Or, perhaps, Flaccus seems to rant deliriously in those verses where he says: 'The just man and one tenacious of purpose not the ardor of the people ordering wicked things, not the expression of an insisting tyrant shakes from his firm belief.'⁴ Nothing truer than this can be said, if this refers to those who refuse no tortures, no death, so that they may not swerve from faith and justice, who do not tremble at tyrannical orders, nor prison, nor the sword, provided that they keep true and lasting liberty in a constant mind, and it must be regarded by a wise man in this way alone. Who is so insolent, so lofty as to forbid me to raise my eyes to heaven, to impose on me the necessity either of worshiping what I do not want to or of not worshiping what I wish? What would be left to us further, if even this which must be done by will the desire of another wrenches from us? No one will bring about that if there is any virtue in us for despising death and pain.

If we hold this constancy, why are we judged fools who do those things which the philosophers praise? Rightly, then, does Seneca, throwing the charge of incongruence up to men, say: 'The highest virtue seems to them to be a great soul, and the same ones consider him who despises death as a lunatic, which is certainly an indication of the greatest perversity.'⁵

But these adherents of false sects cast this up to us with the same folly with which they do not know the true God, people whom the Erythraean Sibyl calls 'light-minded' and 'unintelligent,' that is, thick and stupid, who neither hear nor per-

⁴ Horace, *Odes* 3.3.1.

⁵ Seneca, frg. 69. Some place it in the book, *On an Untimely Death* (cf. Lactantius 1.5.26; 3.12.11); others comparing with Tertullian, *Apology* 50 take it from his work on *The Remedies of Chance*.

ceive divine things, but who fear and adore the earth fashioned into images by their own fingers.⁶

Chapter 14

There is a great reason—for they are not deceived in vain—why they consider those who are wise to be foolish, and we must carefully explain this, so that they may at last recognize their errors, if this is possible. Justice by its very nature bears a certain likeness to folly, and I can confirm this by both divine and human testimony. But perhaps we would do nothing with them unless we should show them from their own authors that it is not possible for anyone to be just, which is joined to true wisdom, unless the same man seem to be a fool. Carneades was a philosopher of the sect of Academicians.¹ One who does not know the man's very work would understand what force, what eloquence, and what acumen in disputation was his from the praise of Cicero or Lucilius. In the latter, Neptune, discussing a very difficult point, shows that it cannot be explained, 'not if Orcus should send back Carneades himself,'² who, when he had been sent by the Athenians to Rome, discussed justice fluently in the hearing of Galba and the censorious Cato, then very great orators. But the same man on the next day subverted his disputation by a contrary one, and the justice which he had praised the day before, he took away, not even with the gravity of a philosopher, whose opinions ought to be firm and stable, but as though in a kind of oratorical exercise of taking both sides of a debate. He was accustomed to do that, to be able to refute others by taking any particular stand. That discussion in which justice was overturned is recalled by Lucius Furius in Cicero. I suppose it was because he was discussing the re-

⁶ *Sibylline Oracles* VIII.399.

¹ Cicero, *The Republic* 3.6.9 must be Lactantius' source for this section.

² Lucilius Bk. I, frg. 10.

public that he might bring in its defense and praise, without which he believed the republic could not be ruled. For Carneades, in order to disprove Aristotle and Plato as patrons of justice, in the first disputation gathered all those things which were said in behalf of justice, so that he might be able to overturn it, as he did. For it was very easy for justice to be made to fall since it did not have any base, because, then, there was none on the earth, so that what it was, or of what sort, was discerned by the philosophers. And would that so many and such men had as much knowledge for fulfilling the defense of the greatest virtue as of eloquence and spirit! The origin of this virtue is in religion; its reason is in equity. Those who do not know that first part could not even grasp the second.

Now I want to first show what it is carefully and briefly, so that it might be understood that the philosopher did not know justice, and that they could not defend that which they did not know.

Although justice embraces all the virtues at the same time, there are two, the most important of all, which cannot be removed or separated from it: piety and equity. For faith, temperance, probity, innocence, integrity, and others of this sort can either by nature or by training of parents be in those men who do not know justice, just as they always have been. The old Romans who used to glory in justice, gloried certainly in those virtues which, as I said, can set out from justice and be separated from their very source. But piety and equity are its veins, as it were. In these two sources all justice rests: its head and origin in the first, in the second all its strength and reason.

Piety is nothing other than a getting acquainted with God, as Trismegistus defined it very truly, as we said before.³ If it is piety to know God, and this is the highest form of this acquaintance that you may cultivate, certainly he does not know justice who does not hold to the religion of God. For how

³ Cf. Bk. III, ch. 15.

can he know that itself who is ignorant of whence it comes to be? Plato said many things about the one God by whom he said the world was formed, but he said nothing about religion. He had dreamed about that God; he did not know Him. And if he or anyone else had wished to make a complete defense of justice, in the first place he ought to have overturned the religions of the false gods, because they are opposed to piety. Because Socrates tried to do just that, he was thrown into prison, so that it might then be clear what was going to happen to those men who began to defend true justice and serve the one God.

The other part of justice is equity. I do not speak of the equity of judging well, which is itself laudable in a just man, but I mean that of equalizing self with fellow-men, which Cicero calls equability.⁴ God who creates and inspires men wished them all to be fair, that is, equal. He set the same condition of living for all; He begot all unto wisdom; He promised immortality to all. No one is segregated from His heavenly benefits. Just as He divides His one light equally for all, lets His showers fall upon all, supplies food, grants the sweetest rest of sleep, so He bestows the virtue of equity upon all. With Him, no one is master, no one slave. For if He is the same Father to all,⁵ we are all free by equal right. No one is a pauper with God except him who is in need of justice; no one rich, but him who is filled with the virtues; no one, finally, is distinguished except the one who has been good and innocent; no one very illustrious, unless he has done the works of mercy with largesse; no one quite perfect, unless he has completed all the steps of virtue. Wherefore, neither the Romans nor the Greeks could hold justice, because they had men distinguished by many grades, from the poor to the rich, from the lowly to the powerful, from private citizens even to the most sublime heights of kings. For when all are

4 Cf. Cicero, *The Republic* 1.27.43; *On Duties* 1.25.88; *On Oratory* 1.42.188; 2.52.209.

5 Cf. Lucretius 2.992.

not equal, there is no equity, and inequality itself excludes justice, whose whole power is in this, that it makes equal those who came to the condition of this life by an equal lot.

Chapter 15

If those two sources of justice, then, are altered, all virtue and all truth is removed, and justice itself goes back into heaven. Therefore, it is not true that the good has been discovered by philosophers, since they did not know whence it came or what it accomplished. This has been revealed to our people and to no others. Someone will say: 'Are there not among you some poor, some rich, some slaves, some masters? Is there not something of concern to individuals?' Nothing. Nor is there any other reason why we take for ourselves the name of brother one to another, unless it is that we believe that we are equal. For since we measure all human things, not by the body, but by the spirit, and although the condition of the bodies may be diversified, there are not slaves among us, but we regard them and we speak of them as brothers in spirit and as fellow-slaves in religion. Riches do not make their possessors distinguished, except that they can make them more illustrious in good works. For they are rich, not because they have riches, but because they use them for works of justice. And those who seem poor are, however, rich in this, that they are not in need and they desire nothing. Since we who are free are equal to the slaves and the rich to the poor in lowliness of spirit, however, we are noted according to virtue in God's sight. One is the higher as he is more just. If it is justice to make oneself equal even with inferiors, although he excels in this very thing, that he coequates himself with inferiors; however, if he conducts himself, not only as an equal, but as an inferior, surely he will attain a much higher grade of dignity in the judgment of God.

Since in this wordly life all things are short and faltering, and men prefer themselves to others and strive over dignity, than which there is nothing more shameful, nothing more arrogant, nothing more removed from the way of wisdom, all those earthly things are opposed to those that are of heaven. Just as the wisdom of men is the height of foolishness with God,¹ foolishness, as I explained, is the greatest wisdom, so he is lowly and despised with God who was conspicuous and lofty upon earth. But that I may be silent about the fact that these present goods of earth to which great honor is attributed are contrary to virtue and enervate the vigor of the mind, what nobility, then, can be firm, what wealth, what power, since God is able to make the very kings also inferior even to the lowest? And so, taking thought of us God especially fixed among the divine commands this one: 'Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.'² The healthfulness of this teaching shows that he who has made himself low among men and practiced humility will be regarded as outstanding and marked before God. Nor is that sentence in Euripides false which goes like this: 'What things are considered evil here, these are good in heaven.'³

Chapter 16

I have set forth the reason why the philosophers could not discover justice nor defend it. Now I go back to that which I had intended. Carneades, therefore, because those things which were asserted by the philosophers were weak, took upon himself the boldness of refuting them, since he knew they could be refuted. This was the summation of his discussion: 'Men have sanctioned laws for themselves for utility, varied, obviously, according to customs, and often changed among the

¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 3.19.

² Matt. 23.12.

³ Euripides, frg. 1100 (from the doubtful and spurious lines).

same people for a time. There is, however, no natural law. All men and other living creatures are driven toward their own advantage by the lead of nature. Accordingly, then, there is either no justice, or if there is some, it is the highest foolishness, since one would be harming himself by having consideration for another's advantage.'¹ And he introduced these arguments. All people who flourished with power, even the Romans themselves, who were possessors of the whole world, if they should wish to be just, that is, if they make restitution of other people's goods, they would have to meet misfortune and be thrown in need and misery. Then, omitting the commonplaces, he came to individual things. 'A good man,' he said, 'if he have a fugitive slave, or an unwholesome and pestilential house, which fault he alone knows, and therefore advertizes their sale, shall he declare that he is selling a fugitive slave or a pestilential house, or shall he conceal this from his buyer? If he acknowledges it, he is indeed good because he does not deceive, but, however, he will be judged a fool, since he will sell at but a small price or not at all. If he conceals it, he will be indeed wise because he considers the matter, but the same man will be evil because he deceives. Again if one finds someone who thinks that he sells yellow copper, although that is gold, or lead, when it is silver, will he be silent so that he may purchase it at a small price, or will he make it known that it may cost him more? Surely it seems to be foolish to prefer the large price.'² From this he wished it understood that both he who is just and good is a fool, and he who is wise, evil, and yet that this could be done without ruin, that men might be content with poverty.

Then, he passed on to greater matters in which no one could be just without peril of life. For he said: 'Surely, it is justice not to kill a man, absolutely, not to touch a stranger. What, then, shall a just man do, if perhaps he has suffered shipwreck and someone weaker in strength has taken his plank?

¹ Cicero, *The Republic* 3.12.21.

² *Ibid.*, 3.19.29,30.

Will not the plank overthrow that one so that he himself climbs up and leaning on it escapes, especially since there is no witness in the middle of the sea? If he is wise, he will do this; he must perish unless he does. But if that just man prefers to die now rather than bring force against another, he is a very fool who does not spare his own life while he spares another's. Likewise, if the enemy should begin to pursue, the battle line of their own side routed, and if a just man should come upon someone wounded on a horse, will he spare him and have himself killed, or will he throw him down from the horse, so that he himself may have a way to escape the enemy? If he does this, he is wise, but the same one is evil; if he does not do it, he is just, but at the same time he must be a fool.³

Thus, when he divided justice into two parts, saying that one was civil, the other natural, he subverted both, since there is a civil wisdom, indeed, but not justice; and that justice is, indeed, natural, but not wisdom. These are clearly sharp and envenomed points which Marcus Tullius could not refute. For when he makes Laelius answer Furius and speak for justice, he passed over these and left them unrefuted, as though they were a pit, so that the same Laelius seems to have defended, not natural justice which had come into the crime of foolishness, but that civil justice which Furius had conceded was wisdom, indeed, but injustice.

Chapter 17

Because it was pertinent to the previous discussion, I have showed how justice bears a resemblance to foolishness, in order that it may be clear that not without cause are they deceived who think that men of our faith are fools who are seen to do such things as that one proposed. Now I believe that it is further required of me to show why God has wished to take

³ *Ibid.*, 30,31.

justice, enveloped in the likeness of folly, away from the eyes of men, if I shall have first answered Furius, because Laelius replied not at all fully. Though it be granted, surely, that he was wise, as he was called, however, he was not in any way able to uphold true justice, since he did not hold to the very head and source of justice. That defense is easier for us, though, to whom through the kindness of heaven justice is familiar and thoroughly understood, and who know it not merely by name but in actuality. Plato and Aristotle desired, truly with honest intention, to defend justice, and they would have accomplished something if the teachings of divine truths had aided their good attempts, their eloquence, the quality of their genius.¹ So their work has lain vain and useless, nor have they been able to persuade any man to live by their prescription, because that teaching did not have a foundation from heaven.

It is necessary that our work be more certain, for God has taught us. They played around with words and imagined a justice which was not in sight, and they could not confirm with present examples the things which they asserted. For it could be answered by their hearers that it was not possible in the way they were prescribing in their discussion, for the reason that up to that time none had existed who followed that kind of life. We, however, show not merely by words, but by examples drawn from reality, that those things which we say are true. Carneades realized, therefore, what the nature of justice is, except that he did not perceive deeply that it was not folly, although I think I understand with what mind he did this. For he did not really believe that the man who is just is a fool, but although he knew that he was not, and yet did not grasp the reason why he seemed such, he wanted to show that the truth lay in hiding, in order that the principle of his teaching might be preserved. Its chief notion is that nothing can be perceived.

Let us see, then, whether or not justice can have any alli-

¹ Cf. Cicero, *Republic* 3.8.

ance with folly. He says that if a just man does not take away a horse from a wounded man or a plank from one shipwrecked in order to save his own life, he is a fool.² First of all, I say that a chance of this sort can in no way befall a man who is, indeed, truly just, because a just man is not an enemy to anyone nor does he desire anything whatsoever that belongs to another. Why would he be sailing or what would he seek from another land whose own satisfies him? Why would he be waging war or involving himself in the rage of others in whose mind perpetual peace with men dwells? Actually, will he be delighted with foreign prizes and human blood who does not know how to acquire gain, whose manner of living suffices him, and who considers it wrong, not only for himself to commit murder, but even to be present and look on when others do it?³ But I pass by those things, because it can happen that even against his will a person may be forced to attend these affairs. Do you think, then, O Furius, or rather, you Carneades, for that whole speech was yours, that justice such as that is so inane, so superficial, and so contemptible to God, that it is of no avail and has nothing within itself which may be of value for its own protection? But, of course, those who do not know the pledge of man and, therefore, refer all things to this temporal life, are not able to know how much power there is in justice. For when they treat of virtue, although they know that it is very full of trials and miseries, they still say that it must be sought for its own sake, and its rewards, however, which are eternal and immortal, they see in no way. So, when all things are referred to this present life, clearly they reduce virtue to folly, inasmuch as it undertakes such great labors of this life in vain and inanely. But we will take this up more fully in another place;⁴ meanwhile, let us get back to justice as we began. Its power is so great that, when it raises

² Cf. ch. 16.

³ This may refer to many of the public spectacles and entertainments which Christians considered it sinful to attend.

⁴ Cf. ch. 18.

its eyes to heaven, it merits all rewards from God.⁵ Rightly, then, did Flaccus say that the power of innocence was so great that it would need neither arms nor strength for its protection, wherever it might be. 'The man who is whole in life and free from crime has need of no Moorish darts, nor a quiver, no, Fuscus, nor of a case heavy with poisoned arrows, whether his way be through the burning Syrtes, or whether he will journey to the inhospitable Caucasus or the places which the fabulous Hydaspes washes.'⁶ It cannot but happen that amid the crises of tempests and battles heavenly protection will be with the just man, and also, even though he travel along with parricides and criminals, that he will be spared evils, so that one just and innocent soul may be freed, or certainly, that his alone will be saved, though others perish under them.

Let us grant that what the philosopher proposes can happen. What, then, will the just man do if he should find a wounded man on a horse or a shipwrecked one on a plank or raft? Not unwillingly I declare it. He will die rather than kill. And, therefore, justice, because it is the singular good of man, will not receive the name of folly. For what is better, what ought to be dearer to man than innocence? Surely, this must be so much the more perfect, as you have brought it to the extremity and have preferred to die lest anything of the purpose of innocence be lessened. It is foolishness, he says, to spare another's life at the ruin of one's own.⁷ Surely, you will not judge him a fool who dies for friendship, will you? Why, then, are those familiar Pythagorean philosophers praised by you, one of whom gave himself to the tyrant as death bail for the other, and that one at the appointed time, when his sponsor was already being led forth, made presentation of himself and by his intervention set him free? Their virtue, whereby one wished to die for his friend and the other for loyalty, would not be held in such great honor if they were thought fools.

⁵ Cf. Matt. 5.3-10.

⁶ Horace, *Odes* 1.22.1-8.

⁷ Cf. ch. 16.

Finally, because of this very virtue the tyrant showed favor to them by saving them both, and the nature of a very cruel man was changed. It is said that he even besought them to receive him as the third into that friendship.⁸ He approached them, not as though they were fools, but as good and wise men. And so I do not see why, since it is thought to be the highest glory to die for friendship and faith, it is not also glorious for a man to die for innocence. Therefore, they are very foolish who charge us with crime for wishing to die for God, when those same people exalt to the sky with the highest praises him who wanted to die for a man.

And to conclude this discussion, then, reason itself shows that it is not possible for the same man to be just and a fool, for the same one to be wise and unjust. He who is a fool knows not what is just and good and, therefore, he always sins. He is led as though a captive by vices, and he is not able to resist in any way, since he lacks virtue which he does not know. The just man, however, restrains himself from sin, and he cannot act otherwise if he has the knowledge of right and wrong. But who can distinguish right from wrong unless he be wise? Thus it happens that he can never be just who is a fool, nor one who shall have been unjust ever wise. And if this is quite true, it is clear that he who has not taken a plank from a shipwrecked man or a horse from a wounded one is not a fool, since to do these things is a sin from which the wise man restrains himself. Still, he seems to be one, and I myself admit it, because of the error of those who are ignorant of the peculiar nature of each thing. So this whole question is solved not so much by arguments as by definition. Foolishness, therefore, is an erring in deeds and words through an ignorance of the right and good. So the foolish man is not he who does not spare himself even, so long as he does no harm to another, which is evil. This, in fact, both reason and truth itself prescribes for us. We see in all the animals who are without wisdom that nature is the cause of itself. They harm

⁸ Cf. Valerius Maximus IV.7, ext. 1.

others, then, that they may advantage themselves, but they do not know that it is evil to do harm. Man, however, since he has the knowledge of good and evil, restrains himself from harming, even with inconvenience to himself, which an irrational animal is not able to do, and for this reason, innocence is numbered among the highest virtues of man.

From these things it is clear that he is very wise who prefers to die in order not to do harm, so that this may serve as the function by which he is distinguished from the dumb beasts. He who does not contradict the error of the salesman so that he may buy gold cheap, or the one who does not admit that the slave is a fugitive, or that he is selling a ruined house, because he is taking his own gain and advantage into consideration, is not wise, as Carneades wanted him to seem, but he is cunning and astute. Cunning and astuteness, though, are also present in the dumb animals, either when they lie in wait for others and take them by trickery in order to devour them, or when they mock the trickery of the others in various manners. Wisdom, however, applies to man alone. For wisdom is knowledge either for the doing of good and the right or for the refraining from wicked words and deeds. The wise man never desires gain, since he despises these earthly goods; nor does he suffer anyone to be deceived, because it is the duty of a good man to correct men's errors and to lead them back to the way of right, inasmuch as man's nature is social and kindly, by which means alone he has a relationship with God.

Chapter 18

But certainly this cause brings it about that he seems to be a fool who prefers to be in want or to die rather than to do harm or to take something from another, because they think that man is destroyed by death. From this conviction all errors arise, both those of the rank and file and those of the

philosophers. If we are nothing after death, surely, only a very foolish man does not concern himself with this life, that it may last as long as possible and be full of all advantages. He who will be so concerned will necessarily depart from the rule of justice. But if there remains a life of man, better and longer, and we learn this from the arguments of the great philosophers and the responses of the seers and the divine words of the prophets, then it is the mark of a wise man to despise this present life with all its goods, every sacrifice of which is compensated for by immortality. In Cicero that same defender of justice, Laelius, says that 'virtue almost demands honor, and there is no other reward of virtue.'¹ It is plainly and, indeed, most worthy of virtue, which you, Laelius, were never able to imagine, for you knew nothing of the divine writings. Then he continues: 'She easily, therefore, accepts this but does not bitterly exact it.' You are very much in error if you think that a reward could be paid to virtue by man, although you yourself said very truly in another place: 'What riches will you cast upon this man? What powers? What realms? He thinks those things human; he considers his own goods divine.' Who, then, would think you a wise man, Laelius, when you contradict yourself, and a little while later take away from virtue that which you have just given it? But, of course, it is ignorance of the truth with an uncertain and wavering opinion. Then, what do you add? 'But if all the ungrateful or the many envious, or the unkind powerful ones despoil virtue of its rewards. . . .' How fragile, how empty a virtue you have brought in, if it can be despoiled of its own reward! If 'he judges his own goods as divine,' as you said, who can there be so ungrateful, so envious, so powerful as to be able to despoil virtue of those goods which were divinely conferred upon it?—'lest,' he says, 'she might delight herself with much solace and especially sustain herself with her beauty.' With what solace? What beauty? When she often comes into the charge of being crime, and when that beauty

¹ The source for all of this section was Cicero's *Republic* 3.28.40.

is turned into punishment. What if, as Furius said, she is 'seized, harassed, exterminated, put in want, her hands taken away, eyes dug out, condemned, bound, consumed, killed also in wretched ways,'² shall virtue lose its reward then, or rather will she herself perish? By no means. She will still receive her reward, with God as judge, and she will live and will always flourish.

If you take this away, nothing in the life of men can seem to be so useless, so foolish as virtue, the natural goodness and uprightness of which can teach us that the soul is not mortal and that a divine reward has been constituted for it by God. For this reason God wished virtue itself to be concealed under the mask of folly, so that the mystery of His truth and religion might be secret; so that He might condemn of vanity and error these religions and that earthly wisdom which exalts itself too high and which gives much pleasure to itself; and so that, finally, when the difficulty has been determined, a very narrow path might lead the way to the reward of immortality on high.

I have disclosed, I think, why our people are regarded as foolish among fools. For to prefer to be tortured and killed rather than to put upon the fire the incense held by three finger tips³ seems as senseless as to care more for the life of another than for one's own. They do not know how wrong it is to adore anything else besides God, who established heaven and earth, who made human nature, inspired it, and gave it light. And if the most wicked of slaves, who abandoned his master by running away, is held, and that one is judged worthy of beatings and chains and the work-house and the cross and all evil, and if a son is believed in the same way depraved and impious, who has left his father so as not to obey him, and on account of this same reason is thought worthy to be disinherited and have his name blotted out from the family forever, how much more worthy of all this is he

² Cf. ch. 12.

³ Christians were required to sprinkle just a few grains of incense over a fire before the statue or image of the emperor or some state god to be absolved from their charge.

who deserts God to whom the two names of Lord and Father apply and are equally venerable? Does the man who buys a slave at a price confer any benefit upon him besides food, which he supplies to him for the sake of his own good? And he who begets a son does not have it in his own power that he be conceived, that he be born, that he live. From this it is clear that he is not a father but only a minister of generation. Of what punishments, then, is he deserving, who is a deserter of Him who is true Lord and Father except those which God Himself determined, who prepared eternal fire for the unjust spirits, because He Himself threatens the impious and rebellious through His prophets?

Chapter 19

Let those destroyers of souls, their own and those of others, learn, therefore, and admit how inextinguishable is their crime; first, because they destroy themselves by serving the most depraved demons whom God has condemned to eternal punishments; then, because they do not allow God to be worshiped by others, but strive to avert men to deadly rites, and strain with the utmost diligence lest there be any soul unharmed on the earth which may gaze toward heaven, its condition being unimpaired. What else shall I say except that they are wretches who obey the instigations of their plunderers, whom they consider gods? They know neither their condition nor their origin nor their names nor their purpose, but by a common, inherent conviction, they gladly go astray with them and favor their folly. If you ask them the plan or purpose of this conviction, they can give none, but they take shelter in the decisions of their ancestors because they were wise, they approved of them, they knew what was best, and they despoil themselves of their senses, swear away from reason, while they believe the errors of others. Thus they are implicated by ig-

norance of all things, and they do not know themselves nor their gods. Would that they alone were in error, that they wished to be unwise by themselves! They drag others into the alliance of their evil, as though they would have comfort from the perdition of many. This very ignorance causes them to be so evil in following up the wise and to pretend that they are taking thought of them, that they wish to call them back to a good mind. They do not insist, do they, by this speech or some plan to cause those admissions? Never. But by force and torments. Strange, blind madness! An evil mind is thought to be in those who try to keep faith, but a good mind in torturers! Is an evil mind in those who are torn and lacerated against the right of humanity, against all justice, or is it rather in those who do those things to the bodies of the innocent, which the most ravenous thieves have never done, nor the most angered enemies, nor the most savage barbarians? Do they not, therefore, lie to themselves, so that the names of good and evil are transferred and interchanged? Why, then, do they not call day, night, and the sunlight, darkness? Why, it is the same shamelessness to impose the name of the evil upon the good, that of fools upon the wise, that of the impious upon those who are just. And, furthermore, if they have any confidence either in philosophy or in eloquence, let them arm themselves and refute these tenets of ours, if they can. Let them come together and discuss the points singly.

It is fitting that they take up the defense of their gods, lest, if our arguments should become strengthened, as they are growing stronger daily, they be deserted along with their shrines and mockeries. And since they can effect nothing by force—for the religion of God is increased the more it is oppressed—they may succeed rather by speech and exhortations. Let their pontiffs come to the center, either the lesser ones or the greater, their flamens and augurers, likewise their sacrificial kings and those who are the priests and overseers of their religion. Let them invite us to the assembly. Let them urge the acceptance of the cults of their gods; let them per-

suade that there are many by whose power and providence all things are ruled; let them show the origins and the beginnings of their sacred rites and their gods and how these were handed down to mortals. Let them explain the source, what the reason is; let them put forth what gain there is in the religion, what penalty there is for its contempt; why they wish themselves to be revered by men; what human piety will confer upon them if they are blessed. Let them confirm all these points, not by their own personal assertion, for the authority of mortal man avails nothing, but by some divine testimony, just as we do. There is no need of force and injury, because religion cannot be forced.¹ It is a matter that must be managed by words rather than by blows, so that it may be voluntary. Let them display a battle line of their geniuses. If their reason is true, it will be claimed. We are prepared to listen, if they should teach. Certainly, we believe nothing of those who are silent, just as we do not yield even to those who are in a rage. Let them imitate us, that they may expose the plan of the whole matter; for we do not entice that they may object to it, but we teach, we prove, we explain. And, therefore, no one is retained by us against his will—for he is useless to God who is without devotion and faith²—and so no one departs while the truth itself is compelling.

Let them teach in this way if they have any assurance of truth. Let them speak, let them open their mouths; let them dare, I say, to discuss with us something of this sort, and then, indeed, their error and foolishness will be ridiculed by our 'little old women and children' whom they despise. For since they are very skilled and know the progeny of the gods and their deeds and powers and deaths and burials from books, and since they know that the very rites by which they were initiated came to be from the actions of men or by chance or from the dead, it is incredible madness to think that they,

1 Cf. Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* c. 2.

2 It is not that we are ever really of use to God. It is necessary, though, to use human language and ideas even in discussing divine matters and there our human words can but fail.

who they do not dare to deny were mortals, are gods. Or if they should be so rash as to deny this, their writings and those of their own people would refute them; and finally, the very initiations of their sacred beliefs would convince them. They would know from this very fact how much difference there is between the true and the false, when they themselves, although they are eloquent, are not able to persuade, and the unskilled and untrained are able to, because the matter itself and the truth speaks.

Why, then, do they rage? That they may augment foolishness while they wish to lessen it. Poles apart are execution and piety, and truth cannot be joined with force nor justice with cruelty. But rightly do they not dare to teach anything about divine matters, lest they be mocked by our people and deserted by their own. For usually the common people whose judgment is simple and uncorrupted, if they should find out that those mysteries were established unto the memory of the dead, would condemn them and seek something else more true which they may revere. Hence, 'faithful silences in religious matters'³ have been instituted by clever men, so that the people may not know what they worship. But, since we are familiar with their teachings, why do they not believe us who know both, or why do they envy us who have preferred true ones to false? 'But the sacred rites which have been publicly embraced must be defended,' they say. How the poor things err, though their intention is honest! For they think that there is nothing in human affairs more important than religion and that it ought to be defended with the utmost strength, but as they are deceived in the very religion, so also are they in the manner of its defense. Religion ought to be defended, not by killing but by dying, not by fury but by patience, not by crime but by faith. The former action each time belongs to evil, the latter to good, and it is necessary that good be the practice of religion, not evil. If you wish, indeed, to defend religion by blood, if by torments, if by evil,

³ Vergil, *Aeneid* 3.112.

then, it will not be defended, but it will be polluted and violated. There is nothing so voluntary as religion, and if the mind of the one sacrificing in a religious rite is turned aside, the act is now removed; there is no act of religion.

It is right reason, then, to defend religion by patience or death in which faith is preserved and is pleasing to God Himself, and it adds authority to religion. If someone, who in this earthly military service keeps faith toward his king by some outstanding deed, becomes more acceptable and dearer if he should live afterwards, and, if he should die, attains supreme glory because he met his death for his leader, how much more ought faith to be kept with the Commander of all, who is able to pay the reward of virtue, not only to the living, but also to the dead? Therefore, the worship of God, since it is a kind of heavenly military service, desires devotion and the greatest faith. For how will God love the one worshiping Him if He Himself is not loved by that man; or how will He grant whatever one praying should ask, when he comes to pray neither from his heart nor in a proper manner? When those others, however, come to do sacrifice, they offer nothing intimate, nothing personal to their gods; they have no uprightness of mind, no reverence, no fear. And when the empty sacrifices have been gone through, they leave all their religion in the temple and with the temple, just as they had found it, and they do not bring or take back with them anything from it.

Thence it is that religions of this sort cannot make people good, nor can these religions be firm and immutable. Men can easily be led astray by these, because in them nothing is learned for life, nothing for wisdom, nothing for faith. What, then, is the superstition of those gods? What is their power? What is their discipline? What origin have they? What reason? What foundation? What substance to their religion? Where does it tend, or what does it promise, so that it can be faithfully preserved and strongly defended by man? I see nothing else in it than a ritualistic act which pertains only to the

fingers. Our religion, however, is firm and solid and immutable in this, that it teaches justice, that it is always with us, that it abides in one entire soul of the worshiper, that it has the mind itself for a sacrifice. In theirs, nothing else is required but the blood of beasts and smoke and a senseless libation; but in ours, a good mind, a pure heart, an innocent life. To the former there come without any love shameless adulteresses, wanton bawds, indecent harlots; there come gladiators, thieves, robbers, poisoners, and they pray for nothing else but that they may commit their crimes with impunity. What would a sacrificing gladiator or highwayman ask for except that they might kill? What would a poisoner or wizard want except to deceive? What a harlot but to sin more? What an adulteress except the death of her husband or that she might conceal her impurities? What a seductress but that she might divest many of their goods? What would a thief desire except to pile up more? Here, however, there is no place for false and common sin, and if anyone comes to the sacrifice with a conscience not clear, he hears what God threatens, that God who sees the hidden places of the heart, who is ever hostile to sins, who exacts justice, who demands faith. What place is there here for an evil mind or an evil prayer? But those unhappy souls do not understand from their crimes how that which they worship is evil, inasmuch as, defiled with all manner of outrages, they come to pray and think that they have piously offered sacrifice if they wash their skin, as if any rivers might wash or any seas purify the wantonness enclosed in their hearts. How much more wise it is rather to cleanse the mind which is defiled by evil and to dispel all vices by the one washing⁴ of virtue and faith! And whoever has done this,

4 No doubt the sacrament of baptism is being referred to here. The Latin word *lavacrum* might have become the usual term, except that the transliteration of the Greek word, *baptismus*, perhaps on the authority of the great Tertullian, gained acceptance and consecrated usage. However, the sacrament of penance might have been meant, but the significance of the other, and the fact that in Lactantius' time it was received more usually in adulthood, seem to warrant our interpretation of this section as a reference to baptism.

although he may have a stained and sordid body, is sufficiently pure.

Chapter 20

Because they do not know either what or how they should worship, blind and imprudent they fall into the contrary. So they adore their enemies; they placate robbers and their murderers with victims; and they place their own souls to be cremated with the very incense on their detestable altars. And the wretches are angry, too, because others do not perish at the same time with incredible blindness of mind. What would they see who do not see the sun? If they were in truth gods, as it were, they would need the help of men against their despisers. Why, then, are they angry with us if they have no power? Unless it be because they themselves are destroying their own gods of whose power they are diffident. They are more irreligious than those who do not worship at all. Cicero in his *Laws*, when he was instructing on the chaste approach to religious sacrifices, said: 'Bring piety; keep wealth away. He who does otherwise will have the god himself for judge.'¹ Indeed, this he said rightly. For it is not right not to have hope in the god whom you worship, since you think him powerful. How, then, is he able to vindicate an adherent of an injury if he cannot do so for himself? It may be asked of them, therefore, to whom they think they show themselves very powerful by forcing the unwilling to sacrifice.² To those same ones whom they force? What is done to one rejecting the favor is not a favor. But they must take thought even for those not wanting it, since they do not know what is good. Why, then, do they so cruelly harass them, and torture and weaken them, if they want them safe? Or whence is piety so impious that they should destroy them in wretched ways or make them useless, those of whom they mean to have been

¹ Cicero, *Laws* 2.8.19.

² Cf. Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* c. 2.

considerate? Or, in fact, do they surpass the gods? That is not a sacrifice which is wrested from one against his will. For unless it is one spontaneous and from the heart, it is an execration, when men do it driven by proscription or injuries or prison or torments. If those are gods who are thus worshiped, assuredly, on account of this alone, they ought not to be worshiped because they wish to be worshiped in this way. They are truly deserving of the detestation of men to whom libation is offered with tears, with groans, with blood pouring from all the members.

We, however, do not ask that anyone against his will should worship our God,³ who is the God of all whether they wish it or not, nor are we angry if he does not worship Him. But we confide in the majesty of Him who can punish one so despising of Himself as also the labors and injuries of His servants. Therefore, when we endure wickedness, we make opposition by not even a word, but refer vengeance to God,⁴ not as those do who wish to seem defenders of their gods and rage savagely against those who do not worship them. From this it can be understood how it is not good to worship the gods, since men would have been drawn to good by good rather than by evil; but, because that is evil, then its duty also lacks the good.

But those who destroy religions ought to be punished. The fact of our destroying is not anything worse, is it, than what the nation of the Egyptians do who worship the most disgraceful images of beasts and cattle and who adore, as though gods, certain things disgraceful to mention? Is there anything worse than that those very same ones who, although they say that they worship the gods, yet deride them publicly and shamefully; about whom they even allow mimes to be performed with laughter and pleasure?⁵ What sort of religion is this, or how great must this majesty be considered which is

³ *Ibid.*, *Apology* c. 24.

⁴ Cf. Heb. 10.30; Isa. 47.3; Sir. (Ecclus.) 12.4, etc.

⁵ Often the mimes and mime dialogues were lewd caricatures of stories of the gods.

adored in the temples and mocked in the theaters? And those who do these things do not pay the price for violating a divinity, but they are honored even and praised when they depart. And is it worse that we destroy than that certain philosophers say outright that there are no gods, but that all things come to be of their own accord, and that everything which happens is by chance? Are we worse than the Epicureans who, although they grant that there are gods, deny that they care for anything, and they say that they are neither angered nor moved by any favor? By these words, certainly, they teach that they ought not to be worshiped at all, since they do not regard with pleasure those who worship them, nor are they angered at those who do not. Furthermore, since they harangue against fear, they are trying to bring about nothing else but that no one should fear the gods. Yet these things are freely listened to by men, and they are discussed with impunity.

Chapter 21

They are not violent toward us, therefore, because the gods are not worshiped by us—for they are not worshiped by many—but because the truth is with us, which, as it is quite truly said, begets hatred.¹ What, then, shall we think except that they do not know what they suffer? For not those very ones persecute men who do not have a reason for being angry with the innocent, but those who are contaminated in spirit and depraved, to whom the truth is both known and hateful, insinuate themselves in their minds and instigate the unwary into fury.² These, as long as there is peace among the people of God, avoid the just and quake with terror, and when they seize the bodies of men and violate their souls, they are called to witness by them and are put to flight by the name of the true God. When this is heard, they tremble and cry out and

¹ Cf. Terence, *Andria* 1.1.41.

² Cf. Cyprian, *To Demetrianus* 15.

testify that they are burned and beaten, and when asked who they are, whence they came, and how they crept upon the man, they confess. Thus, wrenched and tortured by the power of the Divine Name, they are banished. On account of these beatings and threats, they always hate the holy and just men. And since they are able to harm them not at all by themselves, they persecute with public hatreds those whom they think a burden to themselves, and they give vent to a rage as violently as they can, in order that they may lessen their faith through pain, or, if they cannot do this, that they might remove them altogether from the earth lest there be any who can restrain their malice.

It does not escape me what answer can be made in reply to this. Why does that one only God, that great God whom you confess the Ruler and Lord of all things, allow these things to be done, and why does He not vindicate or protect His worshipers? Why, too, are those who do not worship Him wealthy and powerful and happy, and why do they get possession of honors and realm and have subject to their sway those same people of His? The reason of this, too, must be given lest any error remain. In the first place, this is the reason why religion is thought not to possess the power of God, because men are influenced by the appearance of earthly and present goods which in no way pertain to the care of the mind. And because they see that the just lack these and that the unjust abound in them, they think that the worship of God is vain in which they do not perceive those goods, and they judge the rites of the false gods true since their worshipers enjoy riches and honors and kingdoms. But those who are of this opinion do not understand very deeply the strength and reason of man which is not entirely in the body but in the mind. They see nothing more than what appears to the eyes, namely, the body. Because it is visible to the eyes and touchable by the hand, it is weak, frail, mortal. To it belong all those goods which are wonderful to desire: wealth, honors, powers, since they bring pleasure to the body, and, therefore, they are as

transitory as the body itself. But the soul (and in this alone is man's rationality), since it is not subject to the eyes, and since its goods cannot be beheld, for they are placed in virtue alone, must necessarily, therefore, be as stable and constant and lasting as is virtue itself, in which is the soul's good.

Chapter 22

It would take long to give forth all the species of virtue that I might show from each one how necessary it is for a wise and just man to keep far away from those goods which the unjust enjoy, and because they do, the cults of the gods are believed to be true and efficacious. As far as concerns the present question, it is enough if we prove from one virtue what we intend. A great and exceptional virtue, to be sure, is patience, which the popular voices of the crowd and philosophers and orators equally celebrate with the greatest praises. And if it cannot be denied that this is a very high virtue, it is necessary that the just and wise man be in the power of the unjust man so that he may possess patience. Patience is an enduring with equanimity the evils which are inflicted or fall upon one. Therefore, the just and wise man, since he possesses virtue, has patience within him; and he will lack this absolutely if he suffers nothing of adverse circumstances. On the contrary, he who enjoys prosperity is impatient and is lacking a very great virtue. I say he is impatient because he suffers nothing. Innocence also he is not able to preserve which is itself a virtue proper to a just and wise man, but he often does harm and desires the goods of others and seizes what he had desired through injury, because not having virtue he is subject to vice and sin, and forgetful of his weakness he is insolent and puffed up with exalted ideas.

Thence it comes about that the unjust and those not knowing God flourish with wealth and power and honors. For all

these are the rewards of injustice since they cannot be lasting and they are sought for with greed and violence. The just and wise man, however, since 'he judges all those things human,' as was said by Laelius, 'but his goods divine,'¹ does not desire anything of anybody else's, lest he hurt him against the law of human nature somehow. Neither does he desire any power or honor, lest he do someone an injury, for he knows that all have been created by the same God and constituted in the same condition and joined by the tie of fraternity. He is content with his own and with little,² since, mindful of his frailty, he does not seek for more than whereby he may sustain life, and from that which he has he gives a share also to him who has not, because he is pious, and piety is the highest virtue. There is, moreover, the fact that he despises transitory and vice-laden pleasures for the sake of which wealth is sought, because he is self-controlled and the conqueror of his passions. The same one, having no boastfulness or insolence, does not exalt himself too high nor raise a proud head, but he is placid and agreeable and ordinary, because he knows his own condition. Since, therefore, he does injury to no one and does not desire what is another's, nor defends what is his own if it be taken from him by force; and since he also knows how to bear with moderation injury that has been brought upon him, because he is endowed with virtue; then, it must be that the just man should be subjected to the unjust, and that the wise be afflicted with contumely by the unwise, so that the one may have sin, because he is unjust, and the other possess virtue, because he is just.

If anyone wishes to know more fully why it is that God allows the evil and unjust to become powerful, happy, and rich, whereas He suffers the pious to be lowly, despised, and poor, let him take up the book of Seneca entitled, *Why Many Evils Befall the Good, since There Is a Providence*. In this book he said many things clearly, not from worldly inex-

¹ Cf. Cicero, *Republic* 3.28.40.

² Cicero, *On Duties* 1.21.70.

perience, but wisely and almost divinely. 'God has men as his children,' he says, 'but he allows them to become corrupted and full of vice, to live luxuriously and delicately, because he does not think them worthy of his correction. The good, however, whom he loves, he often chastises, and with constant labors he trains them to the practice of virtue, nor does he allow them to be corrupted and depraved by passing mortal goods.'³

From this it ought to seem strange to no one if we are often punished by God for our misdeeds. Rather, indeed, when we are troubled and oppressed, then especially do we give thanks to our most indulgent Father because He does not allow our corruption to proceed too far, but He corrects us with wounds and stripes. From this we know that we are God's care with whom He gets angry because we sin. For although He could bestow wealth and kingdoms on His people (just as He had given them before to the Jews, whose successors and posterity we are), He wanted it to be under another's rule and power, lest, corrupted by the joy of prosperous circumstances, it might slip into luxury and despise the precepts of God, just as our ancestors did who, often enervated by these frail goods of earth, wandered from discipline and broke the chains of the law. Therefore, He saw in advance to what extent He should bestow rest upon His devoted ones if they had kept His commands, and yet He would correct them if they should not have obeyed His precepts. And so, lest they be as corrupted with leisure as their fathers were with license, He wished them to be oppressed by those in whose hands He put them, so that He might strengthen them when falling, restore them to strength when they had been corrupted, test and try them when loyal. How can a commander prove the valor of his soldiers unless he have an enemy? And although an adversary rise up against that one and against his will, and though he may be conquered because he is mortal, since it is not possible

³ The quotation is probably from a lost portion of Seneca's *On Providence*.

to resist God, He Himself arouses adversaries to His Name, not to fight against God, Himself, but against His soldiers, so that He may prove or strengthen their devotion and faith until He shall reestablish abandoned discipline by the blows of oppression.

There is also another reason why He allows persecutions to be carried on against us. It is that the people of God might be increased, and it is not difficult to show how and why this is done. First, very many people are put to flight from the cults of the false gods by a hatred of cruelty. Who would not shrink from such sacrifices? Then, virtue and the faith itself are attractive to certain ones. Some suspect that not without cause is the worship of the gods thought to be evil by so many that they would prefer to die rather than do that which others do that they may live. Someone wishes to know what that good is which is defended even to death, which is preferred to all things that are pleasing or dear in this life, and from which neither loss of possessions, nor of light, nor pain of body, nor torture of its members deter.⁴ These are very strong, but those causes have always increased our number. The people standing around hear them saying in the very midst of torments that they do not sacrifice to stone statues made by human hands, but to the living God who is in heaven. Many know that this is true and admit it in their hearts. Then, as is accustomed to happen in uncertain matters, while they question each other as to the cause of this perseverance, many things which pertain to religion, being noised abroad and caught in turn, are learned. Since these things are good, they must please them. Besides vengeance gained, as it always happens, strongly impels to belief. This is not a slight cause, either, the fact that unclean spirits of demons inhabit the bodies of many people, permission having been granted. When these have been ejected afterwards, all who have been cleansed adhere to the religion whose power they have felt. These many reasons, gathered together, marvelously gain a great multitude for God.

⁴ Cf. Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* c. 5.

Chapter 23

Whatever, then, the evil princes contrive against us God Himself allows to be done. Still, let not those most unjust persecutors, to whom the Name of God has been a reproach and mockery, think that they will go unpunished because they have been the ministers, so to speak, of His indignation against us.¹ They will be punished by a judgment of God, those who, when they had gained power beyond human measure, have abused and insulted God overweeningly and have impiously and nefariously cast down His eternal Name and trampled upon it. On that account He promises that He will quickly avenge Himself against them and 'will drive the evil beasts from the face of the earth.'² But although the same God is accustomed to vindicate the distresses of His people, even here in the present life, however, He orders us to await patiently that day of heavenly judgment on which He Himself will honor or punish each one according to his merits. Therefore, let not sacrilegious souls hope that those whom they thus trample will be despised and unavenged then. His pay will come to the furious and voracious wolves who have torn to pieces just and simple souls even though they have admitted no crimes. Let us strive only that nothing else may be punished in us by men save justice alone. Let us put forth all our strength to be rewarded by God with the revenge and reward of suffering at the same time.

1 Cf. Tertullian, *Ad Scapulam* 3.

2 Cf. Lev. 26.6; Ezech. 34.25.

BOOK SIX

ON TRUE WORSHIP

Chapter 1

NDER THE INSTRUCTION of the Divine Spirit and with the aid of Truth Itself, we have completed the duty of the work which we undertook. Science and the faith and Our Lord Himself imposed upon me the cause of investigating and revealing the truth. Without Him it is not possible for anything either to be known or to be explained. I come now to that topic which is the highest and most essential of this work, namely, to show by what rite or by what sacrifice God is to be fittingly worshiped. For that is the duty of man and in it alone consists the highest purpose of things and the whole way of the blessed life, especially since we have been fashioned and inspired by Him, not that we might behold the heavens and the sun, as Anaxagoras thought, but that we might worship with a pure and untarnished mind the Maker of the sky and the God of heaven. Although in the preceding books I defended the truth as much as my slight ability granted, still it can be quite clearly drawn out from a consideration of the rite itself that holy and singular Majesty desires nothing else from man other than innocence alone. If anyone offers this to God, he will fulfill his duties piously enough and religiously enough. But since men, through the neglect of justice, have become defiled with all manner of wickedness and crime, they think themselves religious if they have stained temples and altars with the blood of sacrificial victims, if they

have spilled upon fires a libation of fragrant old wine. Why, they even prepare sacred feasts and offer exquisite banquets, as if there will be some benefit from this to those making the libations. Whatever is rare to behold or precious in workmanship or fragrance, these things are judged to be pleasing to their gods, not from some knowledge of the divinity which they do not have, but from their own desires, and they do not understand that God does not need earthly riches.

For they have knowledge of nothing except the earth, and goods and evils depend upon the sensation and pleasure of the body alone. As they weigh religion from this standpoint, so do they arrange the actions of their whole lives. And because they have once diverted themselves from the contemplation of heaven, and have bound that heavenly perceptiveness to the body, they give rein to their passions, just as though they were to carry away with them the pleasure which they hasten to take at every moment, although the mind ought to use the service of the body, not the body use the service of the mind.¹

The same ones judge wealth as the greatest good. If they are not able to acquire this by fair means, they get it by foul. They deceive, steal, plunder, entrap, lie;² they consider nothing of moderation or seriousness, as long as they shine with gold and gleam with silver and jeweled clothing; they load delicacies upon a most avid stomach; and, equipped with a retinue of personal attendants, they always strut among the people who have been moved aside for them. So, as addicts and slaves of pleasure, they black out the vigor and strength of their minds, and when they think that they are enjoying life to the full, they are hastening most furiously to death.

As we explained in the second book,³ the purpose or plan of heaven is in the soul, and that of earth is in the body. Those who neglect the goods of the soul and seek those of the body are involved in darkness and in death, which are of the earth and the body; whereas life and light are from heaven. Those who are without these, through their serving of the

¹ Cf. Sallust, *Catiline* 1.2.

² Cf. *ibid.* 12.2.

³ Cf. Bk. II, ch. 12.

body, are far away from an understanding of divine things. The same blindness everywhere presses down the wretched. For just as they do not know who the true God is, so they are ignorant of what is the true religion.

Chapter 2

Let them, therefore, immolate fat rich victims to a hungry god, as it were; let them pour out wines as though for one thirsty; let them enkindle lamps as though for one passing his time in darkness. But if they can imagine or conceive in their minds what those heavenly goods are, whose magnitude we cannot grasp because we are still subjected to bodily sense, then, they may know that they are most foolish with these inane practices. Or if they wish to contemplate the celestial light which we call the sun, then, they will realize how God does not need their lamps, who Himself gave for man's use a light so brilliant, so bright. And yet, when there is in this so small a circle (for on account of its great distance it seems to have no greater measure than a human head) so much of brilliance that the sight of mortal eyes cannot gaze upon it, and if you look for a little while, a blur and darkness come upon blinded eyes, what are we to think, then, of that light and that brightness in the presence of God Himself with whom there is no night? He so moderated this very light that it should not harm living beings by excessive brightness or vehement heat, and He gave to it as much of those qualities as mortal bodies could suffer or as the ripening of fruits would need. Is that man, then, to be considered of sound mind who offers the light of waxen candles as a gift to the Author and Giver of light?¹ He demands from us another light, not a smoking one, to be sure, but as the poet says, 'shining and clear,'

¹ Lactantius would seem to decry the use of candles in religious worship. The Church has consecrated this use. The objects of Lactantius' scathing remarks could not discern between the symbol and the spiritual reality for which such a symbol might stand.

the light of the mind, of course, on account of which we are named mortals by the poets.² But only the one who knows God can display this quality.

Their gods, however, because they are earthly, need lights so as not to be in darkness. Their worshipers, since they savor nothing heavenly, even call down to the earth the religions which they observe. There is need of light there since its purpose and nature is darksome. So they do not assign to their gods a heavenly sense, but a human one, rather; and, therefore, they believe that those things are necessary and pleasing to them, the food which is ours when hungry, or the drink when thirsty, or the clothing when cold, or the light, when the sun has departed, so that we may see.

From nothing, however, can it be so proved and understood that those gods, although they may have once lived, are dead, as from the very rite itself which is entirely of the earth. What of heavenly goodness can the spilled blood of beasts with which they stain altars have in itself? Perhaps they believe that the gods feed on that which men spurn to touch. And whoever bestows this gorey feast upon them, though he be a thief, an adulterer, a poisoner, a parricide, he will be blessed and happy. They love him, they regard him, they grant him whatever he should ask. Rightly, therefore, does Persius deride in his own manner superstitions of this kind. 'With which boon', he says, 'do you buy the ears of the gods? With a lung and milky ointments?'³

He realized, of course, that there is no need of flesh meat for placating celestial majesty, but of a holy mind and just soul and heart, as he himself says, 'which is noble with natural uprightness.'⁴ This is heavenly religion, which does not consist of corrupt things, but in the virtues of the soul which originates in heaven. This is true worship in which the mind of

² Perhaps this is a reference to Lucretius 5.281 and 3.1. The etymology is *phōtes*, from *phōs*, light.

³ Persius 2.29,30.

⁴ *Ibid.* 2.74; cf. Lactantius 2.4.11.

the one paying worship offers itself an immaculate victim to God.

Now how this must come about, how it must be bestowed, the matter discussed in this book will bring out. Nothing can be so outstanding or so suitable to man than to instruct men unto justice.⁵ According to Cicero, Catulus in the *Hortensius*, preferring philosophy to all things, says that he would 'rather have only one small book on duty than a lengthy oration in behalf of the seditious man Cornelius.'⁶ This sentiment is surely not to be ascribed to Catulus who, perhaps, did not say it, but to Cicero who wrote it, I suppose, in order to recommend the books which he was going to write about duties in which he testifies that 'in all philosophy there is nothing better and more fruitful than to give the precepts of life.'⁷ If those to whom the truth is not known do this, how much more should we do it who have been enlightened and instructed by God and who are able to give true precepts! Neither shall we teach, however, as though we were passing on the first elements of virtue which is infinite, but as though we have undertaken the teaching of him who seems to be already perfect in those elements. Letting their precepts which give right instruction unto probity remain, we will superimpose upon them for the perfection and consummation of justice those principles which they do not yet know or hold. I will pass by, therefore, the things which can be accepted by them and us in common, lest I seem to change in any point to those whose errors I have determined to refute and to open up.

Chapter 3

There are two ways over which it is necessary that human

⁵ Cf. Dan. 12.3: They that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that instruct many unto justice as stars for all eternity.

⁶ Cicero, *Hortensius* frg. 47.

⁷ *Ibid.*, *On Duties* 1.2.4; 3.2.5.

life progress; one which leads to heaven, the other which presses down to hell, and both the poets in their verses and the philosophers in their disputations have opened up these ways to men.¹ Indeed, the philosophers intended that the one should be understood as a way of virtues, the other of vices. They knew, too, that the way marked by virtues was arduous and difficult at the first approach, but that if anyone should come to its summit after overcoming the difficulty, he would have a smooth way for the rest of the journey, and that he would gain a light and pleasant field and rich and delightful rewards of all his labors. Those, however, whom the difficulty of the first approach deterred, would fall and be detoured to the way of vices which, at the first, is pleasant, so to speak, and much more traveled. Then, when they have advanced on it a little farther, the appearance of that pleasantness is suddenly withdrawn, the road rises as precipitous, now rough with rocks and blocked with briars, now interrupted with pools and lakes or rapid with floods and torrents, so that they must strain and cling and slip and fall. All these things are brought out for this, that it might seem that the labors in getting virtues are very great, but that there are the greatest rewards and solid and incorrupt pleasures in the possession or actuality of them. Vices, on the other hand, with certain natural enticements ensnare the minds of men and then lead them, captured by the appearance of empty delights, to sharp bitterness and misery. Their disputation would be certainly wise, if they knew the forms and limits of the virtues themselves.

They had not learned either what they are or what reward from God remains for them. This we will show in these two books. Such men, because they did not know, or doubted that the souls of men are immortal, estimated both virtues and vices in terms of earthly honors or punishments. This whole disputation, therefore, about the two ways looks to frugality

¹ For this chapter and the ones following cf. *The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles* c. 1.5, and the *Epistle of Barnabas* c. 18 ff.

and luxury. For they say that the course of human life is like the letter Y² because each man, when he has touched the threshold of his first youth and has come into that place, 'where the way separates itself into two parts,'³ may cling waveringly and not know toward which direction he should rather incline. If he find a leader to direct him hesitating to the better things, that is, if he should learn philosophy or eloquence or some honorable art by which he may pass to good success (and this is not possible without very great labor), they claim that he will spend an honorable and abundant life. But if he should not come upon a teacher of frugality, he falls upon the evil path which imitates the appearance of a better one, that is, he gives himself over to sloth, idleness, and luxury. These, of course, seem sweet for a time to one not knowing true goods, but afterwards, however, when he has lost all dignity and personal esteem, he will live in complete misery and disgrace. To the body, therefore, and to this life which we spend on earth, the ends of these were referred. Perhaps the poets did better who meant it to be a crossroads with reference to the nether world; but they are deceived in this, that they proposed those ways to the dead. Both groups, then, interpreted truly, but both were incorrect, because it is necessary that the ways themselves be referred to life, their ends to death.

We, however, do better and we speak more truly who say that those two ways are of heaven and of the lower regions, because immortality has been determined for the just, punishment for the unjust. How these ways rise toward heaven or drop to hell I will explain, and I will disclose what the virtues are which the philosophers did not know. Then, I will show the rewards of these virtues and at the same time also the vices and their punishments. Someone perhaps may expect that I will speak separately about the vices and virtues, although while we are discussing good or evil, that also which is its

² Cf. Jerome, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* c. 10.

³ Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.540.

opposite can be understood. Should you implant virtues, the vices will depart of their own accord; or, if you should root out vices, the virtues will freely crop up. Thus is the nature of goods and evils constituted that the one always fights against, always drives out the other. And so it happens that the vices cannot be removed without the implanting of the virtues nor can the virtues be implanted without a removal of the vices.

We represent these ways, therefore, far otherwise than they were wont to be represented by the philosophers; first, because we say that a guide has been set over each and that each guide is immortal, but that the one is honored who is in charge of virtues and goods, and the other condemned, who oversees vices and evils. They place a leader on the right way only, and he is neither one nor everlasting, since they depict him as any teacher of a good art, who may recall men from sloth and teach them to be proper. But they do not have any but children and youths enter upon this road, simply because the arts are learned in these ages. We, on the other hand, place men of every class and kind and age upon this heavenly road, because God, who is the Leader of that road, denies immortality to no man born. The form also of those ways is not as they believed. Why is there need of the letter Y in opposite and diverse things? That one road, the better one, is turned toward the rising sun; the other, the worse, toward its setting, since he who follows truth and justice will secure possession of the accepted reward of immortality, perennial light; but he who has preferred vice to virtue, falsehood to truth, ensnared by that evil guide, must be borne to the west and to eternal darkness. I will describe each, therefore, and I will show their properties and conditions.

Chapter 4

So the one way is that of virtue and the good, which conducts, not to the Elysian fields, as the poets say, but to the very

vault or citadel of the world, 'but the left exacts the punishments of evil and consigns to impious Tartarus.'¹ For it belongs to that incriminator who, by depraved religious customs, turns, men away from the heavenly route and leads them on to the way of perdition. The appearance and figure of this road is so arranged with sightliness that it seems to be smooth and open and delightful with all manner of flowers and fruits. On it God has placed all the things which are considered as good upon earth; I mean wealth, honor, rest, pleasure, all delights. But along with these are injustice, cruelty, pride, perfidy, license, cupidity, discord, ignorance, deceit, folly, and other vices. Such is the exit of this road. When one has come to the end, whence there is no way back, then, it is so suddenly cut off from all its beauty that anyone who cannot see the fraud beforehand falls headlong into profound depths. Whoever, captivated by the appearance of these present goods and engaged in gaining and enjoying them, does not look ahead at those things which will follow death and turns away from God is cast down, therefore, to hell and will be damned in eternal punishment.

The way that is heaven-bound, however, has been set up to be difficult and steep, rough with shaggy thorns or impeded by jutting rocks, so that it is climbed by a man only with the greatest labor and hard treading and with great danger of falling. On this God has put justice, temperance, faith, patience, chastity, abstinence, concord, knowledge, truth, wisdom, and the other virtues; but along with these, poverty, disgrace, labor, pain, and all bitterness. Whoever stretches his hope far and prefers the better things will lack the goods of earth, so that unencumbered and free he may overcome the difficulty of the road. Nor is it possible for him who has surrounded himself with regal paraphernalia or hardened himself with riches to enter upon those narrow passes or hold to the way.² It is understood from this, then, that the things which they desire come about more easily for the evil and unjust, because

¹ Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.542 f.

² Cf. Matt. 7.13,14; 19.23 ff.

their road is downhill and sloping, but the good arrive at the things which they desire with difficulty, because they are advancing by a hard and steep route. The just man, therefore, since he has entered on a rough and hard path, must be an object of contempt, derision, and hatred. For all, whom cupidity or desire drags headlong, envy him who could have seized virtue and they take it hard that someone has that which they themselves do not have. So he will be poor, lowly, ignoble, subject to injury, and yet enduring all things which are bitter, but if he holds patience fast and brings it to the last step and the end, there will be given to him the crown of virtue, and from God, for the labors which he bore in life for justice sake, he will receive immortality.³

These are the paths which God has assigned for human life. On each He has put good and evil, but in a distorted and inverted order. On His own way He showed, first, temporal evils with eternal goods which is the better order, and on the other, temporary goods first with eternal evils which is worse, so that whoever should choose present evils with justice would attain to greater and more certain goods than those were which he spurned; but, whoever put present goods before justice would fall upon greater and longer-lasting evils than were those which he fled. For since this life of the body is short, it is necessary, therefore, that its goods and evils be short. The spiritual life, though, which is opposed to this earthly one, is everlasting; and because it is, its goods and evils are everlasting. Thus it happens that eternal evils follow upon short goods, and eternal goods follow upon short evils. So, when goods and evils are set before a man at the same time, it is fitting that each one should think within himself how much more satisfying it is to exchange short evils for perpetual goods than to endure perpetual evils for some short and failing goods.

³ It sounds as though Lactantius holds that virtue is its own reward, and that there is the additional one of merited glory. Cf. Matt. 5 for the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount.

Just as in this world when a contest has been entered upon with a foe, you must labor first that you may afterwards be in leisure; you must hunger and thirst, endure heat and cold, rest on the ground, keep vigil, and struggle, so that with property secured and home and household safe, you may be able to enjoy all the blessings of peace and victory. But if you desire present leisure rather than labor, of necessity you do yourself very great evil. For the adversary will seize upon you who do not make any resistance; your fields will be destroyed, your home plundered; your wife and children will come out as booty; you yourself will be killed or captured. Lest all these things happen, present convenience must be put aside so that a greater and more lasting one may be gained. So in all this life, since God has preserved adversity for us so that we might be able to get virtue, present delight ought to be put aside so that the enemy might not overwhelm us. We have to keep watch, stations must be managed, we must go on military expeditions, shed blood to the last drop, and, finally, endure patiently all bitter and heavy trials; and, indeed, the more willingly because God, our Commander, has arranged for us eternal rewards for these labors. And since in this earthly military service, men endure so much labor to gain those things which may perish in the same manner whereby they were gained, certainly, no labor ought to be refused by us who are acquiring that which can in no way be lost.

God, who brought man forth unto this 'military service,' wanted us to stand in battle array, unencumbered, and to watch keenly with intent minds for the treachery of the one enemy or for his open attacks who snatches at us, just as skilled and trained leaders are accustomed to do, furious in various skills according to the nature and customs of each one. In some he injects insatiable cupidity so that he may drive them, bound as if by their own shackles, from the way of truth. Others he arouses with goads of wrath so that he may turn them, intent rather upon doing harm, away from the contemplation of God. Some he sinks in immoderate desires

so that serving pleasure and their bodies they may not be able to look toward virtue. Some he inspires with envy so that occupied with their own torments they think of nothing else but the good fortune of those whom they hate. Others he puffs up with ambitions; these are they who devote all the time and care of their lives to holding offices so that they may mark the calendar days and give their names to the years. The cupidity of certain people reaches too high, not that they may rule provinces with a temporal sword, but that with infinite and perpetual power they may have themselves called lords of all mankind. Those whom he would have seem as 'pious,' however, he would involve in various religious observances, that he might make them impious. But he casts philosophy into the eyes of those who seek wisdom so that he may blind them with the likeness of light, lest anyone comprehend and hold the truth. Thus he blocked for men all the approaches and, rejoicing in the public errors, he walled up the roads. In order that we may dispel these errors and overcome the author of evils himself, God has enlightened us and armed us with true, heavenly virtue. It is about this that I must now speak.

Chapter 5

But before I begin to explain the single virtues, virtue itself must be determined. The philosophers have not correctly defined it; what it is or in what things it exists, what function it has, or what duty. They have kept only its name, but its power and reason and effect they have lost. Whatever things they were accustomed to say in defining virtue, Lucilius gathers together and gives in a few verses. I wish to quote these verses so that, while I refute the opinions of many, I will not be longer than necessary. 'It is virtue, Albinus, to be able to release the precious truth, matters in which we are engaged, in which we live. It is virtue to know that which each thing

possesses for man, virtue to know what is right for man, what is useful, what noble, what things are good and likewise what are evil, what is not useful, base, and ignoble. It is virtue to know the end and measure of the thing to be sought; virtue, to be able to release the precious from riches, virtue to give that which is due to honor by the very nature of the thing. It is to be the enemy and foe of men of evil habits, but the defender of men of good habits; to value these highly, to wish them well, to live as their friend. Besides, it is, first of all, to think of the country's advantage, then, of our parents', and, thirdly and last of all, of our own.¹

From these definitions which the poet summarized and gave briefly, Marcus Tullius, following Panaetius the Stoic,² drew the duties of living and gave them to us in three volumes.³ But we shall soon see how false these are, that it may be clear how much the divine condescension has conferred upon us which opened up the truth to us. 'Virtue,' he said, 'is to know what is good and evil, what is base, what noble, what is useful, what is not.' He could have said this more briefly if he mentioned only good and evil, because nothing can be useful or noble which is not good at the same time, nothing useless or base which is not evil as well. This is seen by the philosophers, and Cicero showed the same thing in the third book of his work mentioned just now.⁴

Knowledge, however, cannot be virtue, because it is not within us, but comes to us from without. That which can pass from one to another is not virtue, because virtue is each one's own. Knowledge is of another's benefit, then, because it is placed in hearing; virtue is wholly our own, because it is placed in the will of doing good. Therefore, just as in undertaking a journey, it is of no avail to know the way, unless there are at hand attempts at and strength for walking; so

1 Lucilius, from an uncertain work, fig. 1.

2 Panaetius was a celebrated leader of the Stoic sect. He was a native of Rhodes and a friend and teacher of Scipio Africanus.

3 Cicero, *On Duties*.

4 *Ibid.* 3.2.7 ff.

knowledge avails nothing if one is without any proper virtue. Generally, also, those who sin realize what is good and bad, even though not perfectly, and as often as they do something wrong, they know that they sin and, therefore, wish to conceal it. And although they are not deceived as to the nature of good and evil, they are overcome by evil cupidity, so that they sin because virtue, that is, the desire of doing right and nobly, is lacking to them.

From this, then, it is clear that the knowledge of good and evil is one thing, and virtue another, because knowledge can exist without virtue, as was the case in many of the philosophers. Therefore, since it rightly pertains to blame not to have done what you knew (was right), then, rightly, a depraved will and vicious mind which ignorance cannot excuse will be punished. And just as virtue is not the knowing of good and evil, so virtue is the doing of good and the not doing of evil. Still, knowledge is so joined with virtue that knowledge precedes virtue, and virtue follows upon knowledge, since simple cognition is of no worth unless action follows. Horace put this a little better, stating: 'It is virtue to flee vice, and it is the first wisdom to have lacked folly,'⁵ but he spoke ineptly, because he finished it contrariwise. It is as if he were saying: 'It is good because it is not evil. But since I do not know what virtue is, I do not even know what vice is. Each, therefore, needs definition, since the nature of the thing is such that it is necessary that each be either understood or not understood.'

Let us do, however, what he should have done. It is virtue to restrain anger, to quell desire, to check passion, that is, 'to flee vice.' For nearly all the things which are done unjustly and wickedly arise from these movements (*adfectus*). If the impetus of this movement (*commotio*) which is called anger be held down, all the evil contentions of men will be lulled; no one will plot and connive; no one will rise up to harm. Likewise, if cupidity is tempered, no one will riot about on

⁵ Horace, *Epistles* 1.1.41.

land and seas; no one will lead an army to plunder and destroy the goods of others. And if the fire of concupiscence is restrained, every age and sex will retain its sanctity; no one will suffer or commit anything shameful. Therefore, when these movements are quieted by virtue, all crimes and disgraces will be removed from the life and practices of men. This quieting of the movements and passions has this purpose, that we may do all things rightly. So the whole duty or office of virtue is not to sin. Certainly, he who does not know God cannot perform this, because of necessity his ignorance of Him from whom good springs thrusts him into vices. Therefore, that I may quite briefly and significantly mark off the greatest duties of each: it is knowledge to know God, virtue to worship Him. Wisdom is contained in the former, justice in the latter.

Chapter 6

I have said that knowledge of the good is not virtue; this was of primary importance. Then, I have explained what virtue is and in what it exists. It follows that I should briefly show this point also, that the philosophers did not know what good and evil is, because it was almost made clear in the third book¹ when I was treating of the highest good. Those who did not know what was the highest good erred necessarily about the other goods and evils which are not the greatest. For he is not able to examine those with true judgment who does not comprehend the source from which they spring. Now, the source of good is God; the source of evil is, to be sure, the ever-enemy of the Divine Name of whom we have often spoken. From these two beginnings goods and evils arise. Those which come from God have this purpose, that they prepare for immortality which is the highest good. Those which are from that other have this function, to call one away from heavenly

¹ Ch. 7.

things and submerge him in those of earth that they may kill him with everlasting punishment which is the greatest evil. Is there any doubt, then, that those who do not know God nor His adversary should be ignorant as to what is good and what evil? Thus, they referred the end of goods to the body and to this brief life, which, of course, must be dissolved and come to its end. They did not continue farther, but all their precepts and all the things which they hold as goods cling to the earth and grovel on the ground, since they die along with the body which is of earth.

They pertain not to setting in order the life of man, but to seeking or increasing wealth, honors, glory, power; all of which are mortal things, just as mortal as he who labored that they might befall him. Hence, that statement: 'Virtue is to know the end and measure of the thing to be sought.'² They give instructions as to what ways and with what skills a familiar thing is to be sought, since they see that it is accustomed to be sought after badly. But virtue of this sort has not been proposed to the wise men. Neither is it virtue to seek wealth, nor is its finding or possession in our power. So the seeking and obtaining are easier in respect to evils than to goods. Virtue, therefore, cannot be in seeking things in contempt of which the force and reason of virtue appear, nor will it sink to those very things which it strives with high and noble spirit to tread upon and trample.³ And it is not right for a soul intent upon heavenly goods to be called away from its immortal riches to gain these fragile things for itself. Rather, the plan and reason of virtue consists most of all in getting ready those things which no man nor death itself can take away from us.

Since this is the case, that is a true line which follows in Lucilius: 'It is virtue to be able to release the precious from riches.'⁴ This verse signifies almost the same thing as the first

² Cf. Lucilius, *loc. cit.*, ch. 5, n. 1.

³ Cf. Cicero, *On Duties* 3.5.24.

⁴ Cf. ch. 5, n. 1.

two. But not any one of the philosophers could himself know the value itself or its preciousness or worth, nor of what nature, nor exactly what it is. The poet and all those who followed him thought that it was to use wealth rightly, that is, to be careful, not to lay out banquets sumptuously, not to bestow gifts rashly, not to waste one's private fortune on superfluous or shameful things. Someone will say perhaps: 'What about you? Do you deny that this is virtue?' I do not, indeed, deny it, for I would seem to approve of the contrary if I should deny it. But I deny that it is true, because that is not heavenly but entirely earthly, since it accomplishes nothing except that it remains on earth. What it is, however, to use wealth rightly, and what fruit ought to be sought from riches, I will declare more openly when I begin to speak about the office of piety.⁵

Now the other things which follow⁶ are in no way true. For to display enmity toward the wicked or to undertake the defense of the good can be shared with those who are evil. Certain people by a feigned probity fortify a road to power for themselves, and they do many things which the good are wont to do, and even the more eagerly because they do them for the sake of deceiving. Would that it were as easy to excel as it is to simulate goodness! But when these begin to be masters of their purpose and desires, and when they have seized the highest grade of power, then, they lay aside the simulation and uncover their morals; they seize all things, they violate and harass; and those very good people whose case they had taken up they now press against; and they cut off or do away with the grades or ranks through which they ascended, lest anyone be able to imitate them in opposition to themselves.

However, let us think that this office, to defend the good, is only that of a good man. It is easy to undertake this, but difficult to fulfill it, because, when you engage in a contest or conflict, the victory is placed in God's will, not your own;

⁵ Cf. ch. 11 ff.

⁶ The remainder of the Lucilius fragment, ch. 5, n. 1.

and, generally, the wicked are more powerful in number and conspiracy than the good, so that for conquering them virtue is not so necessary as good luck. Who does not know how often the better and juster side is vanquished? Always from this reason have bitter dominations risen against the citizens. All history is full of examples, but we will be content with one. Gnaeus Pompey⁷ wished to be a 'defender of the good,' since he took up arms for the republic, for the Senate, for liberty. The same man, however, was conquered and slain with liberty itself, and by Egyptian eunuchs was beheaded and cast aside without burial. It is not virtue, therefore, to be 'an enemy of the evil' or a 'defender of the good,' because virtue cannot be subject to uncertain accidents.

'Furthermore, to think first of the advantages of the fatherland'⁸ means nothing at all when the discord of men has been removed. For what are the 'advantages of the fatherland' except the disadvantages of another state or tribe, that is, to spread territories violently seized from others, to increase empire, to get greater tax-paying dominions? All these are surely not virtues, but the reversals of virtues. In the first place, the union of human society is removed, innocence is taken away, abstinence from another's property is destroyed, and, finally, justice herself is done away with. For justice is not able to bear the division of the human race, and wherever arms flash, it is necessary that she be put to flight and exterminated. That statement of Cicero's is true: 'Those who say that the purpose of the citizens must be upheld deny that of the aliens. These break asunder the common society of the human race; and, when this is removed, beneficence, liberality, goodness, and justice are utterly taken away.'⁹ For how can he be just who does harm, who hates, who despoils, who kills?

7 The 'Great' Pompey, who saved Rome against the pirates and won her supremacy in the East, and who fought against and was defeated by Julius Caesar in the Civil War. While fleeing Caesar into Egypt, he was captured and brutally slain. Caesar, however, punished his murderers and gave his body decent burial.

8 Cf. Lucilius, *loc. cit.*, ch. 5, n. 1.

9 *On Duties* 3.6.28.

Those who strive to be of advantage to the fatherland do all these things. Those who think that there is nothing useful, nothing advantageous, except that which can be held in the hand (which is the only thing that cannot be held, because it can be snatched away), do not know what that very advantage itself is. And so whoever has gained these things, goods, as they call them, for the fatherland, that is, he who has overturned states and destroyed peoples and made the treasury swell with money, he who has taken lands and made his fellow-citizens richer, is raised to the heavens; highest and perfect virtue is thought to be in him. This is an error, not only of the people and the untrained, but also of the philosophers who give instructions also for injustice, lest discipline and authority be lacking to folly and evil.

Thus, when they discuss duties pertaining to military affairs, that entire speech is accommodated neither to justice nor to true virtue, but to this life and to civic custom. That this is not justice both the matter itself indicates on one hand, and Cicero himself has testified on the other. 'But we,' he says, 'hold no solid and clearly wrought image of true law and its sister justice; we use shades and images. Would that we were following those themselves! They are raised by the best examples of nature and of truth.'¹⁰ Therefore, it is but a shade and image of justice which they thought was justice. Why is it? Does not the same writer confess that there is no wisdom in philosophy? 'When either Fabricius or Aristides is called just,' he says, 'an example is sought, as it were, by a wise man of fortitude from the one, or of justice from the other. No one of these is wise in such a way as we wish a man to be thought wise; nor were those who were held to be and called wise, Marcus Cato and Gaius Laelius; and, indeed, not even were those seven, but from the frequent association of their profound duties, they bore a certain semblance and appearance of wise men.'¹¹ If, then, wisdom has been taken away from

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 3.17.69.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 3.4.16.

philosophers by their own admission, and justice from those who have been regarded as just, it is necessary that all those descriptions of virtue be false, since no one but a just and wise person can know what true virtue is. No one, however, is just and wise except the one whom God has instructed with heavenly precepts.

Chapter 7

All those who through the acknowledged folly of others are believed to be wise, led on by the appearance of virtue, grasp shadows and images, but nothing real. This comes about in this way, because that deceitful road which leads to a fall has many by-paths on account of the variety of studies and disciplines which are varied and diverse in the life of men. Just as the way of wisdom holds something of folly (and we brought this out in the preceding book),¹ so this way, although it is entirely one of folly, has some likeness of wisdom which those who understand the general folly snatch at. And as it holds manifest vices, so it holds something which seems like virtue; and as it holds open crime, so it holds a certain image and species of justice. For how could the precursor of that way, whose entire force and power are in deceiving, lead all into fraud, unless he were showing men likenesses of the truth? In order that that immortal secret of His might be in hiding, God placed on the way those things of His which men would spurn as evils and disgraces, so that turned away from wisdom and truth which they were seeking without any guide, they might fall upon that very thing itself which they were desiring to escape and avoid.

So He shows the way of perdition and death to be manifold, either because there are many kinds of life, or because the gods which are worshiped are many. The leader of this way, a prevaricator, and crafty, in order that there may seem to be

¹ Bk. V, ch. 14.

some distinction of false and true, of evil and good, leads the luxurious by one path and by another those who are called economical, the unskilled by one and the learned by another, the inactive by one and the energetic by another, the fools by one and the philosophers by another, and those even not all by the one path. For those who do not escape from pleasures or riches, he slightly separates from this public and crowded road, but those who either wish to follow virtue or who profess a contempt for possessions, he draws along certain rocky precipices. Still, all those routes which show the appearance of good are not other roads, but by-ways and paths, which seem, indeed, to be separated from that common road, toward the right, but all, however, go to the same one and are returned at the end to the one goal. There that leader joins them all, where there had been need for the good to be separated from the bad, the strong from the inert, the wise from the fools, in the matter of the worship of the gods, of course, in which that one foils them all with one blow, because they have been fools without any distinction, and he drives them headlong into death.

This road, however, which is one of truth and wisdom and virtue and justice, of all of which there is one source, one power, one abode, and that is simple (by which we all follow with like minds and greatest harmony the one God, and we worship Him), is both narrow because virtue has been given to very few, and steep because it is not possible to get to the good which is highest Good except with the greatest difficulty and labor.

Chapter 8

This is the way which the philosophers seek, but they do not find it for this reason, that they seek rather upon the earth where it is not possible for it to appear. They wander, therefore, as if on a vast sea, nor do they know where they are being

borne, since they neither discern any way nor follow any leader. By the same token it is as fitting for this way of life to be sought as for a way on the sea to be sought by ships; for, unless these watch some light of heaven, they wander in uncertain courses. Whoever strives to hold the right course of life ought not to look at the earth, but at heaven. To speak more plainly, he ought to follow not man but God, not to serve these earthly idols but the God of heaven, not to refer all things to the body but to the soul, not to give his attention to this life but to eternal life. So, if you always raise your eyes toward heaven and watch the sun, how it rises, and keep it the guide of your life as though of a ship, your feet will of their own accord be directed onto the road; and that celestial light, which is for sound minds a much brighter sun than that which we see here with the eyes of the body, will so rule, will so direct that it will conduct to the supreme harbor of virtue and wisdom without any error.

The law of God must, therefore, be taken up, the law which directs us to this way, that holy law, that heavenly law, which Marcus Tullius depicted in the third book of his *Republic* with almost divine words. I have added his words, lest I say more. 'There is, indeed, a true law, right reason, congruent to nature, diffused among all, constant, lasting, which calls to duty by ordering and keeps away from crime by forbidding, which, however, neither orders nor forbids the good in vain, nor moves the evil by ordering or forbidding. It is not right for anything to be opposed to this law nor may anything be removed from it, nor can it be wholly abrogated. Nor, in truth, can we be absolved from this law by the senate or by the people. No Sextus Aelius¹ should be sought as an explainer or interpreter. There will not be one law at Rome and another at Athens, one now and another afterwards, but this one law, everlasting and unchangeable, will hold all peoples and be for all times, and there will be one common Master,

¹ A consul of the year A.D. 4 whose law contained regulations on the limitations of manumission.

as it were, and Commander of all, God. That one is the Inventor, Arbitrator, and Proposer of this law. Whoever will not obey Him will himself flee himself, and spurning the nature of man he will pay the greatest penalty by this very fact, even if he should escape the other punishments which are reckoned.²

Who, with a knowledge of the revelation of God, could so significantly express the law of God as that man, far removed from the knowledge of the truth, expressed it? Truly, I think that those who speak truths, though unaware that they do so, ought to be considered in this way, as though they were divining, having been inspired with some spirit.³ But if, when he saw through the force and reason of the holy law, he had thus understood or explained that also, namely, in which precepts the law itself consisted, he would not have performed the duty of a philosopher but that of a prophet. Since he was not able to do this, we must, for to us the law itself has been handed down by that one Master and Commander of all, God.

Chapter 9

The first dogma of this law is to know God, to serve Him alone, to worship only Him. It is not possible to get at the reason of a man who does not know God as the parent of his life. This is the worst wrong. This ignorance causes him to serve other gods, than which nothing more criminal can be committed. Hence, his steps are inclined toward evil through his ignorance of the true and only good, since God, whom he has avoided knowing, is the very source of goodness. Or if he wishes to follow justice, ignorant as he is of the divine law, he embraces the laws of his nation as though they were the true law, but not justice, but utility has discovered these.

² Cicero, *The Republic* 3.22.33. A better classical and pagan description of the natural law could not have been selected.

³ Cf. the explanation of the gift of prophecy, a grace or power conferred for the general good. The prophet need not be marked by sanctity; in fact, he might not even be aware of his prophecy-making.

Why is it that laws are found different and varied among all peoples, except that each nation has sanctioned for itself that which it judged useful for its own affairs? How much utility recedes from justice, however, the Roman people themselves show who, through their Fetiales,¹ by declaring wars and 'legitimately' doing injustices and always taking and seizing the property of others, gained for themselves possession of the entire world.² But these men think themselves just if they do nothing against their laws. This can also be ascribed to fear, since they refrain from crimes from fear of punishment. Let us grant that surely they do that by nature, or, as the philosopher says, 'of their own accord,'³ which they are forced to do by laws. They will not, then, be just, will they, since they obey the instructions of men who were themselves able to err or be unjust—as were those establishers of the Twelve Tables⁴—or who certainly served public utility for the condition of the time? Civil law is one thing which varies everywhere according to customs, and true justice is another, which God has set down as uniform and simple for all. And whoever does not know Him must, of necessity, be ignorant of justice itself also.

But let us consider that it may be possible for someone to get true virtues through natural and inbred goodness, of such sort as we have learned that Cimon was at Athens.⁵ He gave alms to the needy, took the poor in, and clothed the naked; however, since that one thing which is greatest was lacking, a knowledge of God, all those good acts are empty and vain, so that he labored in vain in performing them. All his justice will be like a human body not having a head; for, although all the members are in it and in their places and have beauty and shapeliness, because that is lacking which is the principle

1 A group of priestly ambassadors who sanctioned treaties and demanded satisfaction and declared wars.

2 Cf. Cicero, *The Republic* 3.12.20.

3 *Ibid.* 1.2.3; *The Laws* 1.18.49.

4 The Laws of the Twelve Tables, the first codification and publishing of Roman Law in 494 B.C. are here referred to.

5 Cimon was a son of Miltiades, a distinguished Athenian general. Cf. his life by Nepos.

of all, it lacks also both life and all sensation. So those members have only the shape of members, not their use. Such a case, too, would be a head without a body. Similar to this is he who, although he knows God, lives unjustly. He has that alone which is greatest, but in vain, since he is in need of virtues as though of members. So, that the body may be alive and sensible, both the knowledge of God is necessary, which is, as it were, the head, and also all the virtues, as though the body. Thus will man become perfect and living, but the highest perfection is in the head, however; because, although the head cannot exist without all the members, still it can exist without certain ones. He will, indeed, be a vicious and weak animal, but he will still live, just as he who knows God and sins in some regard, for God gives pardon for sins. Thus, without some of the members there can be life, but without the head, none at all.

This is the reason that philosophers, although they have natural goodness, yet have no knowledge, have no wisdom. All their doctrine and virtues are without a head, since they do not know God who is the Head of virtue and doctrine. Whoever does not know Him, though he sees, is blind; though he hears, he is deaf; though he speaks, he is dumb. When, however, he comes to know the Creator and Father of all things, then he will see and hear and speak. For he begins, then, to have a head in which all the senses are located, that is, the eyes and ears and tongue. He truly sees who has beheld with the eyes of his heart the truth in which God is, or the God in whom truth is. He hears who has applied to his heart the divine words and life-giving precepts. He speaks who, discoursing on heavenly things, declares the virtue and majesty of the one God.

Wherefore, there is no doubt that whoever does not know God is impious, and all his virtues, which he thinks he holds or possesses, are found in that death-bearing way which is full of darkness. For this reason, there is nothing on which one may congratulate himself, if he has acquired these empty

virtues, since he must be not only wretched who lacks present goods, but he must be a fool as well who undertakes the greatest labors in his life to no purpose. For when the hope of immortality is removed, which God promises to those who practice His worship, and for the sake of attaining which virtue is to be sought, and whatever evil occurs must be endured, surely, it will be the greatest vanity to want to pursue virtues which bring calamities and labors to man in vain. If it is virtue to suffer bravely and to undergo want, exile, pain, and death which are feared by the rest of men, what good, then, does it possess in itself that the philosophers should say that it ought to be sought on its own account? They are delighted, indeed, with superficial and vain punishments who may engage in tranquil pursuits. If souls are mortal, if virtue is going to be nothing when the body is dissolved, why do we shun the goods attributed to us, as if we were ungrateful or unworthy to enjoy the divine gifts? In order to possess those goods we have to live shamefully and impiously, since poverty follows virtue, that is, justice. He is not sane, then, who, having no greater hope set before him, places labors and tortures and misery before those goods which others use in life. But if virtue must be gone after, as it is rightly said by them, since it is agreed that man was born for this, there ought to be at hand some greater hope which may apply great and exceptional comfort for the evils and labors, which it is the part of virtue to endure. In no other way can virtue, since it is hard in itself, be regarded as a good, than if it compares its bitterness with the greatest good. And in no other way is it right that these present goods should be abstained from than if there are other greater ones on account of which it would be worthwhile to do without pleasures and to sustain all evils. And as I showed in the third book,⁶ those are none other than the joys of eternal life.

Who can grant this, though, but God who has proposed virtue itself? Therefore, in the knowledge and worship of

6 Bk. III, ch. 12.

God the highest of all things consists. In this is all hope and salvation for man. This is the first step of wisdom, that we may know who is our true Father, that we many honor Him alone with due piety, that we may obey Him and most devoutly serve Him, that all our acts and care and attention be placed in that accomplishment.

Chapter 10

I have spoken about what is owed to God. Now I will tell what ought to be bestowed upon man, although that which you bestow upon man is bestowed upon God, for man is the image of God. The first work of justice is to be joined with God; the second, with man. The first is called religion; the second is named mercy or humanity. It is a proper virtue of the just and of those who worship God, because it alone holds the reason of common life. For God, who has not given wisdom to the other animals, made them safe by natural protections from danger and attack; but, because He made man uncovered and weak that He might instruct him rather by wisdom, He gave him, besides the others, this affection of piety, in order that man might kindly regard his fellowman and love him and cherish him and take him in against all dangers and furnish him help. Therefore, the greatest bond of men among themselves is humanity or kindness, and whoever destroys this must be regarded as nefarious and a parricide.

If we have all sprung from one man whom God made, then, surely, we are relatives, and for this reason it must be considered the greatest crime to hate a man or to do him harm. Therefore, God has charged that enmities should never be practiced by us but always removed, so that we should remind those who are unfriendly to us of their relationship and mitigate their anger. Likewise, if we have all been vivified and inspired by the one God, what else are we than brothers, and,

indeed, the more closely joined because of our souls than by our bodies? So, Lucretius is not wrong when he says: 'Finally, we are all sprung from heavenly seed. To all that same one is Father.'¹

Therefore, those who harm a man must be considered as fierce beasts who against the right of human kindness and every right spoil, torture, kill, exterminate. Because of this bond of brotherhood, God teaches us never to do evil, always good. The same one Himself prescribes what it is to do that very thing well: to give assistance to the depressed and those laboring, to furnish food to those who have it not. Since God is kind, He wanted man to be a social animal,² and, therefore, in other men we ought to consider ourselves. We do not deserve to be set free in danger if we do not help others; we do not deserve aid if we refuse it. On this matter there are no teachings of philosophers, for, in truth, taken in by an appearance of false virtue, they have taken pity away from man; and, while they mean to make him whole, they have corrupted him. And although the same ones generally confess that the union of human society must be retained, they plainly dissociate themselves from it by the rigor of their inhuman justice.

This error of those who think that nothing should be shared with anyone must also be refuted. They have inferred that there is not one origin and cause of the founding of a city, but some relate that those men who were first born from the earth, since they spent a wandering life through forests and woods and did not cling together by any bond of speech or law, but had leaves and grass for their beds and caves and caverns for homes, were prey for the beasts and other animals.³ Then those who had escaped laceration or who had seen their neighbors hacked to pieces, warned of their own danger, ran to other men, implored protection and made known their

¹ Lucretius 2.991,992.

² Cf. Seneca, *On Benefits* 7.1.7; Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2.

³ For this whole section, cf. Cicero, *Republic* 1.25.40; Lucretius 5.805 ff.

wish first by gestures; then they attempted the beginnings of speech, and little by little perfected the system of speech by putting names on individual things. When, however, they saw that the multitude itself was to be fortified against the beasts, then, they began to fortify towns also, so that they might make the quiet of the night safe for themselves, or ward off attacks and onrushes of the wild beasts, not by fighting, but by throwing up embankments.

Such ability, unworthy of men, which contrived this foolishness! Such wretched and miserable men who entrusted their folly to the memory of literature! Although they saw that, even in the dumb animals, there was an innate plan of coming together, or of seeking each other, or of avoiding danger, or of shunning evil, or of preparing beds and lairs for themselves, yet they believed that they themselves could not be advised or learn what they should fear, or avoid, or do except by examples, and that they would never have come together or have discovered the method of speaking, unless the beasts would have devoured them.

To others these notions seemed mad,⁴ as they really were, and these said that not the ravages of wild beasts were the cause of coming together, but rather humaneness itself, and so they congregated with each other, because the nature of man was one of fleeing solitude and seeking union and companionship. There is not a great discrepancy among those, because, even though they give different causes, the thing itself is the same. Each was possible, then, since they do not contradict; yet each is true in no way at all because men were not born from the earth throughout all the land, as though sowed from the teeth of some dragon, as the poets hold,⁵ but one man was made by God, and from him alone the whole earth was filled with humankind. And by the very same plan, indeed, it happened again after the flood, which they certainly cannot

4 Cf. Cicero, *The Republic* 1.25.39.

5 Cf. especially Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.105; 4.573; 5.647; 7.122 for this usual treatment of the poets of the origin of man.

deny. No gathering together of this sort was made in the beginning, and he who is not deprived of reason will understand that there never were men on the earth who did not speak beyond infancy.

However, let us pretend that those things are true which idle and foolish old men relate so that we may refute them by proofs from their own senses and reasons. If men gathered together for this reason, to protect their weakness by mutual assistance, then help must be given to the one who needs it. Since men have entered upon and sanctioned alliances with other men for the sake of protection, it must be considered exceedingly evil either to violate or not to keep safe that contract preserved from the beginning of its origin among men. He who removes himself from the furnishing of aid also must remove himself from receiving it, since he thinks that he needs the help of no one who denies his help to another. This man, therefore, who dissociates and severs himself, must live, not according to the practice of man, but according to the mode of the beasts. If this cannot be, the bond of human society must be retained in every way, since man cannot live without man in any way at all. The retention of this society is community, that is, to offer aid, so that one may receive it. But if, as those others dispute, the congregating of men was done for the sake of humanity itself, man certainly ought to acknowledge man. If those uncultured men did this, and if those still wild did it when the manner of speaking had not yet been established, what should we think ought to be done by those polished men, joined together by an exchange of speech and of all things; men who, accustomed to other men, cannot endure solitude?

Chapter 11

Humanity must be preserved, therefore, if we wish to be rightly called men. That very thing, to preserve humanity or

humaneness, what else is it than to love a man because he is a man and the same thing which we are? Discord, then, and dissension are not according to the nature of man, and that statement of Cicero's is true which says, 'A man obedient to nature is not able to harm a man.'¹ If, then, to harm a man is against nature, to be of advantage to man must be, therefore, according to nature. Who does not do this robs himself of the name of man, since it is the duty of humaneness to come to the aid of man in necessity and danger. I ask those, therefore, who do not think it the part of a wise man to be moved and show pity, if a man, seized by some beast, should ask aid for himself of an armed man, and whether they think the aid ought to be given. They are not so bold as to deny that what humaneness exacts and demands ought to be done. Likewise, if someone should be caught in a fire, be overwhelmed with ruin, be drowning in the sea, or be caught in a river torrent, do they think that to bring aid is not the part of man? They themselves cannot be men if they think so—for no one is able not to be subjected to dangers of this sort—rather, in truth, they will say that it is the part of a man, and of a brave hero, to save one about to perish. If, then, in cases of this sort, since they bring danger to the life of man, they grant that it is humane to give succor, what is the reason why they do not think that help should be given if a man be hungry, thirsty, or cold? Although they desire the one same humaneness, yet they distinguish those, because all things are measured, not by true reality itself, but by present utility. Those whom they rescue from danger they hope will render favors to them, but since they do not entertain this hope in the case of the needy, they think that whatever they give to men of this sort is lost. Thus, that detestable sentiment in Plautus: 'He deserves ill who gives a beggar something to eat, for he loses that which he gives, and he prolongs for him a life of misery.'² But the poet, perhaps, spoke according to the

¹ *On Duties* 3.5.25.

² *Trinummus* 2.2.58,59.

character in the play. Still, does not Marcus Tullius in his official writings urge this same thing—that bountiful giving is not to be practiced absolutely? He spoke in this way: Bountifulness which is practiced customarily exhausts the very source of kindness. Thus, kindness is removed by kindness. The more people you use it upon, so much the less are you able to use it upon many.³ And just a little later he continued: ‘What is more foolish than not to be able to take care that you may do for a longer time that which you do freely?’⁴

The professor of wisdom, to be sure, checks men from the practice of humaneness, and he warns them to carefully guard their private possessions and prefer to keep a strong box rather than justice. Because he realized that this was inhuman and wicked, soon, in another chapter, as if driven by repentance, he speaks thus: ‘Sometimes, however, bountifulness must be bestowed, and this kind of generosity is not to be completely rejected; often, too, with suitable needy men you ought to share what you possess.’⁵ What does he mean by ‘the suitable’? Of course, those who are able to repay the favor and give in turn. If Cicero were living now, I would surely declare to him: ‘Here, at this point, Marcus Tullius, you have strayed from true justice, and you have taken it away by one word, when you measured the duties of piety and humanity by utility. For bountifulness must be bestowed not on “suitable” men, but as far as possible on those not suitable. That is done justly, that is done piously, and that is done humanly which you do without hope of receiving. This is that “true and genuine justice” of which you say that you hold “no solid and clearly wrought image.”’⁶

You yourself cry out in many places⁷ that virtue is ‘not mercenary,’ and you admit in your books *On Laws* that liberality is gratuitous with these words: ‘There is no doubt that

³ Cicero, *On Duties* 2.15.52.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* 2.15.54.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.* 3.17.69.

⁷ Cf. Cicero, *The Laws* 1.18.48; *Archias* 11.28; *Milo* 35.96, etc.

he who is called liberal and kind follows duty, not profit.⁸ Why, then, should you bestow bounty on the 'suitable' rather, unless it is that you might receive a reward later? Then, according to your own authority and teaching on justice, whoever will not be 'suitable' will be afflicted with nakedness, thirst, and hunger, nor will men who are affluent and abounding with delicacies come to aid their ultimate necessity. But if virtue does not exact pay, if it is to be sought after 'for its own sake,' as you say, then, estimate justice, the mother and chief of the virtues at its own value, not by your advantage, and bestow liberality chiefly upon him from whom you hope for nothing. Why do you select persons; why look into the members? You must regard whoever asks of you as a man, since he thinks that you are a man. Throw aside those 'shades and images of justice,' and hold on to the real, that fashioned by itself. Give to the blind, the weak, the lame, the destitute. These must die unless you help them. They are useless to men, but useful to God who keeps them in life, who gives them breath, who vouchsafes light to them. Cherish, as much as you can, and support the souls of men with humaneness lest they be extinguished. He who is able to succor one about to perish kills him if he does not give him succor.

Those, however (since they neither retain nature nor know the reward which exists in that), while they fear to lose, lose. And they fall upon that which they especially guard against, so that whatever they bestow either is lost absolutely, or else it is of advantage to them for a very short time. Those who refuse a slight support to the wretched, because they do not want to preserve humaneness at any detriment to themselves, pour out their patrimony to gain for themselves perishable or fragile goods, or certainly to acquire nothing, their own losses being very great.

What ought to be said about those who, influenced by popular levity, spend wealth that would suffice even great cities on spectacles and trinkets to be displayed, except that they are

⁸ Cicero, *On Laws* 1.18.48.

demented and mad to present to the people that which they themselves are losing, and which no one of them to whom it is presented may receive? And so, as every pleasure is unsteady and brief, those of the eyes and ears especially, either men forget and consider the loss of another in place of disagreeable things, or they are also offended if the desire of the mob has not been satisfied, so that even the most foolish men might have gained evil for themselves through evil; or, if they had so pleased, they might gain nothing more than inane favor and the headline reports of a few days. Thus, daily the patrimonies of very foolish men are wasted on superficial things.

Do those act more wisely, therefore, who present more useful and longer-lasting boons to their citizens; I mean those who seek a memorial for their own name by erecting public structures? Not even they act rightly. They bury their goods in the earth, because on the one hand memory does not confer anything upon the dead, nor on the other their works are not everlasting, inasmuch as they are shattered by one tremor of the earth and fall to the ground, or they are consumed by chance fire, or they are destroyed by some hostile force, or they certainly fall, wasted by old age itself. 'There is nothing,' says the orator, 'made by work of hands which old age does not waste and consume. But this justice and leniency flourish more day by day.'⁹

So, those who are bountiful to their underlings and clients, do better, for they grant something to men and they benefit—but that is not true and just bountifulness. There is no beneficence wherever there is not necessity. Therefore, whatever is done for the sake of thanks to those not in need of favor perishes, or it is returned with interest, and it will not be beneficence. Although it may be pleasing to those to whom it is given, it is not, however, just, since no evil follows if it should not be given. The one certain and true office of liberality, then, is to care for the needy and the useless.

⁹ Cicero, *Marcellus* 4.11.

Chapter 12

This is that perfect justice of which the philosophers speak which guards the human society; this is the greatest and truest fruit of riches, not to use wealth for the personal enjoyment of one, but for the safety of many; not for one's own present profit, but for justice which alone does not perish. It must be held, therefore, in every way that hope of getting in return be absolutely removed from the discharge of mercy, for the reward of this work and office must be sought from God alone. For if you expect it from man, it will no longer be humane-ness, but a lending of kindness at interest; nor can he seem to have merited well who performed an action, not for another's, but for his own benefit. However, the act returns to the same one, since that which anyone does for another, hoping to get no personal advantage from it, truly benefits himself, because he will receive a reward from God. So God instructs that, if ever we prepare a banquet, we should invite to the dinner those who cannot invite and repay us in turn,¹ so that every act of our life may not be lacking the function of mercy. And not anyone should think that he has been forbidden or stopped from either communion with friends or from charity toward his relatives, but God has made known to us what work is true and just. Thus, it is fitting for us to live with our relatives and associates, as long as we know that the one act pertains to man, the other to God.

Especially, then, is this so with the virtue of hospitality, and the philosophers say this, too, but they twist it from real justice and seize upon advantage. 'Rightly,' says Cicero, 'has hospitality been praised by Theophrastus. It is, as it seems, indeed, to me, extremely becoming for the homes of illustrious men to be open to illustrious guests.'² In the same manner did he again err when he said that bounty should be bestowed

¹ Cf. Luke 14.12.

² *On Duties* 2.18.64.

upon the 'suitable.'³ Now the home of a just and wise man ought to be open, not to the illustrious, but to the lowly and abject, for the illustrious and powerful can be in need of nothing. Their opulence equips and honors them. Nothing, however, ought to be done by a just man except that which is a kindness. But if a kindness is paid back, it is lost and ended. Nor can we hold that as intact whose value has been paid to us. So in those benefits which have remained sound and uncorrupt, the plan of justice is reversed; they remain not otherwise than if they should be bestowed upon men who can in no way be of profit. But that one, in mentioning receiving 'illustrious men,' looked to nothing else but utility, nor did the clever man dissimulate what advantage he hoped to get from it. For he said, 'He who does this will be strong among outsiders through the favor of princes whom he has bound to himself by the pledge of hospitality and friendship.'⁴

O, with how many arguments could the inconsistency of Cicero be refuted, if I would do it! He would be disproved, not so much by my words as by his own. The same man says, in fact, that in order for each one to refer to his own advantage especially whatever he is doing, he is to be by no means a good man.⁵ Then, he also denies that 'it belongs to a simple and open man to go about and canvass, to simulate and pretend something, to seem to do one thing while he does another, to pretend that he does for another what he is doing for himself, but it rather belongs to one who is malicious and scheming and deceitful and crafty.'⁶ How, then, would one defend that hospitality from being ambitious and malicious? You would run about through all the gates so that you might invite to your house the leaders of the people and the cities who would come your way, that through them you might gain power among their citizens. And would you want to seem just and kind and hospitable, when you would be eager for your

³ Cf. Cicero, *On Duties* 2.15.52,54.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.18.64.

⁵ Cf. *The Laws* 1.18.49.

⁶ Cf. *On Duties* 1.30.109; *The Republic* 3.16.26.

own utility? Truly, he himself, not very incautiously—what is less fitting in Cicero?—but consciously and knowingly, though in ignorance of the true law, sets one against these snares. That he may be forgiven, he testified that he was not giving precepts for true justice, which he did not have, but for a ‘shade and image of justice.’⁷ The shady and imaginary instructor, then, must be pardoned, and truth must not be exacted from him who admits that he does not know it.

The redemption of captives is a great and outstanding work of justice, which the same Tullius himself approved. ‘This kindness,’ he said, ‘is also useful to the republic; for captives to be redeemed from slavery, for the very poor to be enriched. This custom of kindness I place far before the bestowal of gifts; this is the work of serious and great men.’⁸ It is a proper work for the just, then, to care for the poor and to redeem captives, since those who do this are called serious and great even among the unjust. To do well to those who had no hope of receiving the favor is especially praiseworthy. For he who does a good for a relative or neighbor or friend merits, certainly, no great reward, because he ought to do it and would be impious and hateful unless he did that which nature itself and necessity demand from him; and if he does it, he does it, not so much for the sake of gaining glory as for avoiding blame. But he who does it for a stranger, one unknown, is, in truth, worthy of praise because he has been led to do it by humaneness alone. He should not have placed this function of kindness even before the bestowal of gifts. It is a task of comparing and of choosing from two goods what is the better. That bountifulness of men throwing their patrimony into their gifts is inane and foolish and very far removed from all justice. And so they should not even be called gifts in which no one receives except him who does not deserve to receive.

It is no less a great work of justice to protect destitute children and widows and to defend those needing help which the

⁷ Cf. *On Duties* 3.17.69.

⁸ *Ibid.* 2.18.63.

divine law so prescribes to all, since all the best judges think it pertains to their office to favor them with natural humane-ness and to strive to be of help to them. Indeed, these works are proper to us who have received the law, the words of God Himself instructing us.⁹ They realize, indeed, that to protect those who lack protection is to be just naturally, but they do not perceive why it is so. God, whose clemency is perpetual, orders widows and children to be protected and cherished for this reason, lest anyone be hindered by respect and pity for his own dear pledges from embracing death for the sake of justice and faith, but he should unhesitatingly and bravely go to meet it, since he knows that he is leaving his dear ones to God and that His protection will never fail them.

To take up also the work of caring for and cherishing the sick who have no one to assist them is a great work of the highest sort of humaneness. Whoever will have done this will bring a living victim to God, and what he has given another in time, he will receive from God in eternity.

The last and greatest work of piety is the burial of strangers and the poor, a work which those teachers of virtues and justice did not touch upon even. They, who measured all duties by utility, were not able to see that. In other matters which have been mentioned above, although they did not attain to the real point at issue, however, because they caught some advantage in them, they wandered, but held on closely, as though by a certain faint odor of the truth. This point, however, they disregarded, because they could see no advantage in it. Why, there were even not lacking some who made burial an unnecessary thing, and said it was not anything wrong to leave a body unburied and cast aside. The impious 'wisdom' of these has been scorned by the whole human race and also by the divine words, which order this act of burial to be performed. Those do not dare to say that it ought not to be done, but if, by chance, it is not done, there is no harm. So in that matter they prefer the office, not so much of preceptors

⁹ Cf. James 1.27.

as of consolers, so that if by chance such a fate as lack of burial should befall a wise man, he should not think himself wretched on account of it. We, however, do not say what a wise man ought to bear, but what he ought to do. And so we do not ask now whether the whole matter of burying is useful or not; but, even if it is inane, as they think, still it must be done, even for this alone, that among men it seems good and humane to do it. The intention is questioned and the proposition is weighed. We will not, therefore, allow the image and workmanship of God to lie as prey for beasts and birds, but we shall return it to the earth, whence it sprang. Although we will fulfill this duty of kinsmen on an unknown man, humane-ness will take over and fill the place of kinsmen who are lacking, and wherever a man shall be longed for, there we shall think that our office is performed. In what does the plan of justice consist more than in that whereby we perform for strangers through humaneness what we do for our own through affection? And this is more certain and more just, since it is now not offered to the man who realizes nothing, but to God alone to whom a just work is the most precious sacrifice.

Someone will say perhaps: 'If I do all these things, I will have nothing. What then? If a great number of men is in need, if cold, if captured, and dead, so that in caring for these it is necessary to spend my fortune in one day, shall I lose the wealth gained by my labor or that of my ancestors, so that I will have to live on the pity of others? What? Do you fear poverty with so weak a spirit, which even your own philosophers praise and bear witness that nothing is safer, nothing more tranquil than this? This which you fear is the port of cares. Are you ignorant of how many dangers, how many misfortunes you cast aside with this wealth?'¹⁰ These may do well by you if they pass along without your blood. You advance burdened with booty and you bear spoils which goad the spirits of even your own people. Why, then, do you hesitate to put to a good use that which perhaps one robbery will

10 Cf. Cyprian, *On Works and Almsgiving* cc. 9,10.

snatch away from you, or one suddenly arising proscription, or some hostile attack? Why do you fear to make a passing and fragile good everlasting, or to entrust your treasures to the guardianship of God, where you may fear no thief and robber, no moth-destruction, no tyranny?¹¹ He who is rich with God can never be poor.

If you think justice is so great, follow it, casting aside the burdens which oppress you; free yourself from shackles and chains, so that unimpeded you may run to God. It is the part of a great and lofty soul to despise and tread upon mortal things.¹² But if you do not seize this virtue, in order that you may bring your riches to the altar of God, that you may exchange your frail things for stronger ones, I will free you from fear. All these precepts are not given to you alone, but to all the people who are joined in mind and who stick together as one man. If alone, you are not sufficient for great works; however, to practice justice in a manly way, as much as possible by riches among the others, so much do you excel in work. And you must not think that you will be persuaded now to lessen or use up your private property, but to convert to better things what you had been spending on unnecessary things. With that wherewith you have been buying beasts, redeem captives; whence you now feed the beasts, from now on nourish the poor; whence you equip men for the sword, now bury the innocent dead. What is the good of a depraved sense of evil? To make bestial men rich and to instruct unto crime? Transfer to a great sacrifice the things which are to badly perish, so that for these real gifts you may have an eternal reward from God. Great is the reward of mercy for which God promises that He will forgive all sins. 'If you shall hear the prayers of thy suppliant,' He says, 'I also will hear yours. If you have been compassionate toward those in labor, I will have pity upon you in your labor. But if you do not show

¹¹ Cf. Matt. 6.19,20; Luke 12.33.

¹² Cf. Cicero, *On Duties* 3.5.24; cf. also Pseudo-Seneca, *On Customs* 44.

consideration and give aid I will take account of your soul against you, and I will judge you by your own laws.'¹³

Chapter 13

As often as you are asked for help, therefore, believe that you are being tested by God, perhaps that you may be worthy to be heard. Examine your conscience, and as far as you are able, heal its wounds. And although sins are taken away by exercising bountifulness, do not think, however, that a license of sinning is given to you. For they are wiped out, if you show bounty to God, because you have sinned. For if you sin, relying on giving bounty, they are not wiped out. God wishes man to be purged from his sins especially, and, therefore, He orders penance to be done. Now to do penance is nothing else but to profess and affirm that one will not sin anymore. So there is forgiveness for those who imprudently and cautionlessly fall into sin, but he who sins knowingly has not pardon.

If someone should be purified from all stain of sin, he would not, however, think that he should moderate his practice of showing kindness because he does not have the sins which he may thereby destroy. Rather, indeed, he ought to then practice justice the more, since he has become just, so that what he had done previously unto the healing of his wounds, he might do henceforth unto the praise and glory of virtue. He accedes to this point because no one can be without fault as long as he is burdened with the covering of the flesh. Its infirmity lies subject to the dominion of sins in the threefold manner: by deeds, by words, by thought. Through these steps justice advances to the highest point.

The first step of justice is to refrain from evil deeds; the second, from evil words; and the third, from the consideration or thinking of evil things. He who shall have ascended the

¹³ The editors treat this as a quotation, though they can claim no source except that it may be a paraphrasing of Luke 6.36 ff.

first step is just in a sufficient or moderate degree; he who makes the second is already of perfect virtue, since he fails in neither deeds nor words; but he who reaches the third seems, in truth, to have attained a likeness to God. For it is almost beyond human nature to not even admit into one's thoughts what is evil in act or wicked in speech. And so even just men who are able to bridle themselves from every unjust work are sometimes, however, overcome by this very frailty, so that they speak evil in anger, or in the sight of desirable things covet them with silent consideration.

So if our mortal condition does not allow man to be pure of all stain, the sins of the flesh, then, ought to be checked by the constant practice of kindness. It is the one work, indeed, of a wise and just and truly alive man to place all his riches in justice alone. And, certainly, one who is in need of this, though he surpass Croesus and Crassus¹ in riches, he must be regarded as poor, naked, and a beggar. Therefore, we must put forth effort that we may be covered with the garment of justice and piety, which no one may strip from us, because it provides us with everlasting adornment. If the worshipers of false gods adorn senseless images and pile upon them whatever precious possessions they have, for which they can have no use nor give thanks because they have received them, how much more just and more true is it to adorn living images of God, to merit the reward of living? Just as these have use for and give thanks for whatever they receive, so God, in whose sight you do the good work, will approve and will pay the reward of piety.

Chapter 14

If, then, in man mercy is an outstanding and excellent good, and if that is judged the highest good by divine testimonies

¹ Croesus was the legendary king of Lydia who had such wealth that he was believed to have possessed the 'golden touch.' Crassus was a wealthy financier of the last days of the Roman Republic.

and by the agreement of both good and bad men, it appears that the philosophers were far away from human good who neither instructed in anything of this sort nor performed anything like it, but they always held as a vice the virtue which is almost singular in man.

Here, we may interpose one topic from philosophy so that we may more fully refute the errors of those who call pity, desire, fear, diseases of the soul. They are trying, indeed, to distinguish virtues from vices, and this is by all means very easy. For who cannot separate a liberal man from a wasteful one, as they do? Or a thrifty one from a mean one? Or a quiet one from a lazy one? Or a cautious one from a timid one? Because they have as their ends those things which are good. If they exceed these ends, they fall into vices, so that constancy thus becomes boldness unless it is undertaken for truth. In the same way fortitude, if there is no necessity forcing it, or if one undergoes certain danger for no good cause, is converted into rashness. Liberty, too, if it pursues and censures others, rather than resists those who rail, is arrogance. Severity, unless it restrains itself in meting out fit punishment to those who are harmful, becomes harsh cruelty.¹ Therefore, they say that those who seem evil do not sin of their own accord, nor do they preferably choose evils, but that they fall into evils, deceived by the appearance of good,² while they are ignorant of the distinction between good and evil. These goods, in fact, are not false, but they are all referred to the body. For to be sparing, or constant, or careful, or quiet, or strong, or severe are virtues, to be sure, but they are of this temporal life. We, however, who despise this life, have other virtues proposed to us, about which the philosophers were not even able to make a conjecture in any way.³

And so they held certain virtues as vices and certain vices

¹ This is sound Aristotelian teaching on the virtues as means between two vices. Cf. Aristotle's *Ethics* 2: Virtue in its essence is a mean state. Cf. also St. Thomas, Ia. 11ae, q. 64.

² The will necessarily (by natural necessity) chooses good. Cf. St. Thomas 1. q. 82, a.1.

³ The distinction is between the natural and infused moral virtues.

as virtues. The Stoics remove from man all the emotions by the impulse of which the mind is aroused: cupidity, gladness, fear, sadness. The first two of these are of goods, either future or present; the last two are of evils.⁴ In the same manner, they call these four, as I said, 'sicknesses,' not so much implanted by nature as received from a depraved opinion; and, for this reason, they think that they can be extirpated by their roots if the false judgment of goods and evils is taken away. If a wise man thinks nothing is good, nothing evil, he will not burn with desire, nor exult with joy, nor be terrified with fear, nor be torn with grief. Soon we shall see whether they accomplish what they wish or what they do accomplish. Meanwhile, we are concerned with the arrogant and almost wild proposition of those who think that they are sound and able to struggle against the power and plan of nature.

Chapter 15

That these are natural movements, not voluntary, the reason of all living men shows, for it is moved by these same four emotions. The Peripatetics, then, are more correct who deny that these can be taken away, since they are innate in us. And they try to show how providently and how necessarily God, or nature—for thus they speak—has armed us with these emotions. However, because these are generally vicious, if they are excessive, they can be healthfully tempered by man if measure is applied, so that there is left for man as much as is enough for nature. It would not be an unwise disputation, if, as I said, everything were not referred to this life. The Stoics, then, are mad who do not regulate emotions but tear them away, and intend to castrate a man from things implanted in him by nature. It is just as if they should wish to withdraw

⁴ Cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 4.6.11. The traditional treatment is of five passions: joy, sorrow, desire, fear, and anger. Cf. St. Thomas: *1a.11ae*, qq. 22-25.

fear from the stags or poison from snakes or fierceness from wild beasts or contentedness from cattle. These have been given as individual characteristics to the particular animals, but they have all been given together to man. But if, as physicians affirm, the passion of joy is in the spleen, that of anger in the bile, that of desire in the liver, and that of fear in the heart, it is easier to kill the animal itself than to take something from its body, which is to want to change the nature of the animal.

Still, prudent men do not understand that, when they remove vices from man, they take away virtue also for which alone they are making place. For if it is virtue in the middle of an attack of anger to restrain and repress oneself, which they cannot deny, then whoever lacks the anger lacks the virtue also. If it is virtue to control the lust of the body, then he must lack virtue who does not have the lust which he may temper. If it is virtue to check desire from seeking what is another's, certainly, he can have no virtue who is without the yearning for the restraint of which the practice of virtue is used. Where there are no vices, therefore, there is not even place for virtue, just as there is not even a victory where there is no adversary. Thus it is that there can be no good in this life without evil.

The passion is, therefore, a sort of natural richness of souls. Just as a field which is highly productive by nature is rich even in the midst of briars; so a soul, untilled of vices, is overspread by the thistles growing strong of their own accord. But when the true cultivator draws near, immediately the vices will depart and the fruits of virtue will appear. So when God made the first man, He implanted in him, first, those emotions of the soul so that it might take virtue just as the land takes cultivation, and He put the material of the vices in the emotions and that of virtue in the vices. This matter, surely, will be either nothing at all, or it will not be able to be of use, if those things are lacking through which its force appears or exists.

Let us see now what those who completely cut away vices

have brought about. They supplant those four movements or emotions, which they think are born from the opinion of good and evil, and upon whose uprooting they think the soul of a wise man is to be saved, because they know that they are implanted by nature and that without them nothing can be moved, nothing done, and they put certain others in their place.¹ For cupidity or desire they substitute free willing or choice, as if, in truth, it were not much more excellent to desire the good than to want an evil. And in like manner in place of gladness they put joy, and for fear, caution. But in the fourth, a reason for changing the name fails them. So they have suffered grief deeply, that is, sadness and pain of spirit. But this is not at all possible. For who is able not to grieve if pestilence has exhausted the country, or if an enemy overthrows it or a tyrant oppresses it? Can anyone not grieve if he sees his liberty taken away, if his children, his friends; or if good men are done away with or most cruelly tortured? Only one whose mind is so hardened that all sense has been torn from him. Wherefore, either they ought to have removed all things, or this curtailed and weak disputation should have been filled out, that is, something should have been put in place of sadness, too, since this was a consequence to those earlier things so ordered. For, as we rejoice in present goods, so we suffer and grieve over evils. If, then, they put another name on gladness, since they thought it vicious, so it was fitting for another term to be applied to sadness, since they think that is vicious also. Whence it is clear that the experience had not been lacking to them, but the word. Because of this lack, they wanted to take away the whole affection or emotion which is, indeed, the greatest, but against this nature stood forth.

I could have refuted those changes of names by several arguments and showed, for the sake of adorning the speech or increasing its abundance, that many names have been imposed on the same things, or, certainly, that there is not much

¹ Cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 4.6.12-14.

difference between them. For cupidity begins from the will, and caution rises from fear, and gladness is nothing other than a professed joy. But let us think, as they wish us to, that they are different. Surely, therefore, they will say that cupidity is a persevering and perpetual will-choice; that joy giving itself forth immoderately is gladness; that excessive caution, that kind which is beyond measure, is fear. So it happens that they do not remove those things which they think ought to be removed, but they moderate them, inasmuch as they only change the names; the things themselves remain. Therefore, unaware, they are thrown back to that point which the Peripatetics reach by reason: that since vices cannot be removed, they are to be tempered by moderation. They err, therefore, because they do not effect what they wish, and by a long and rough detour they return to the same road.

Chapter 16

I think that not even the Peripatetics have come to the truth. They grant that there are vices, but they temper them with moderation. We must be without even moderate vices. Rather, it should have been first brought about that vices should not exist. Nor can anything vicious be born; but vices come to be if we make bad use of our emotions; virtues, if we use them well. Then, it must be shown that, not the emotions themselves, but their causes ought to be moderated.

They say that we should not exult in gladness too much, but only moderately and temperately. This is just as if they were to say that running ought not to be done quickly, but by stepping quietly. But it is possible for both him who walks to err and for him who runs to hold the right path. Why is this? If I show that there is a condition where to rejoice, not only moderately but even just a bit, is vicious; and that there is another, on the other hand, where to give full vent to gladness

even is not at all bad, what will that moderation avail us? I ask whether they think a wise man ought to rejoice if he sees any evil befall his enemy, or whether he should restrain his joy if, when the enemy have been conquered and the tyrant oppressed, liberty and safety have been secured for the citizens. No one doubts that, in the first case, there should be some rejoicing; and, in the second, to rejoice but a little would be the greatest crime.

The same things can be said about the other emotions. But, as I said, the reason of wisdom is engaged, not in moderating these, but in their causes, since they are moved from without. And it would not be necessary for reins to be imposed upon these very strongly, because they can exist in both a slight crisis and an exceptionally great one; and they can be very great without any crisis at all, but they ought to have been assigned to certain times and things and places, lest those things which it is all right to use become vices. Just as to walk properly is a good, but to go astray is an evil, so to be moved by the passions toward the right is good, but toward wickedness, evil. If passionate desire does not escape beyond its lawful elevation, even though it be vehement, it is still free from fault; but if it seeks something outside that limit, another person, or his domain, even though it be moderate, it is, however, a very great vice.¹ And so it is not a sickness to be angry, or to desire, or to be moved by passion; but to be irascible or violently angry, vehemently and passionately desirous and libidinous is a sickness. He who is irascible is angry also with him with whom he should not be angry or when he should not be. He who is covetous or strongly desirous desires even that which there is no need to desire. He who is libidinous even strains after that which is forbidden by the laws. All reason, therefore, ought to be concerned with this, that, since the drive or impetus of these powers is not able to be inhibited, nor should it be, because it is necessarily implanted for protecting the functions

¹ Cf. Salvian, *The Governance of God* 7.100.

of life, it should be directed rather to the right way where even its course of action may be without offense and danger.

Chapter 17

But I have been carried too far afield by zest for arguing, since it has been proposed to me to show that, not only are those things which the philosophers thought vices not vices, but that they are even great virtues. From these I will draw those which I think especially pertain to the matter, for the sake of instruction. They place dread or fear as the greatest vice, and they hold that it is the greatest weakness of mind. Its opposite is fortitude, and if this is in man, there is no place for fear. Does anyone believe, then, that it is possible for the same fear to be very great fortitude? Not at all. For nature does not seem to accept that something should fall back upon its opposite. But now I will show, not with some bright conclusion, as did Socrates in Plato's works, who forced those with whom he was arguing to admit those things which they had denied, but simply that the greatest fear is the greatest virtue.

No one doubts that it is the sign of a timid and weak soul to fear pain, or want, or exile, or prison, or death. Whoever does not shrink from all of these is judged very strong.¹ He who fears God, however, has no fear of all those things. For proving this there is no need for arguments. For the punishments of the worshipers of God have always been witnessed, and they are still being witnessed throughout the world, and new and unusual torments have been thought up for the torturing of them. In consideration of the various kinds of death, the soul shudders to recall when butchery raged beyond the very manner of death for wild beasts. A happy and unconquered patience endured these horrible lacerations of

¹ Cf. Pseudo-Seneca, *On Customs* 99.

bodies without any groan. This virtue furnished to all peoples and provinces and the very torturers themselves the greatest miracle, when the cruelty was overcome by patience. Still, nothing other than fear of God caused this virtue. And so, as I said, fear should not be torn away, as the Stoics wish, nor tempered, as the Peripatetics hold, but it should be directed unto the true way, and fears should be taken away but only in this way, that this fear alone should be left. Since this is legitimate and true, it alone brings it about that all the rest are not feared.

Cupidity also is numbered among the vices. If this desires things which are earthly, it is a vice; but it is a virtue if it longs for heavenly goods. He who desires to attain to justice, to God, to perpetual life, to everlasting light, and to all those things which God promises man, will despise those riches and honors and powers and kingdoms. Perhaps a Stoic will say that you need will-choice, not desire, for attaining to these. No, in fact, it is to wish little.² For many wish, but when pain attacks their organs, the wishing fails, but the desire remains. If this brings it about that all things which are sought after by others are treated with contempt, it is the highest virtue, inasmuch as it is mother to continency.

For this reason, we ought to bring it about rather that we direct the passions, which it is a vice to use evilly, into the right channels. Those quick movements of souls are like to a connected car. The greatest work of the driver in properly steering this is to know the road. If he holds to this, though he go extremely fast, he will not bump into an obstruction; but if he goes off the road, even though he go gently and smoothly, he will be knocked about on rocky places or he will fall into steep gullies, or certainly, he will be borne where it is not necessary for him to go.³ If that car of life, which is drawn by the passions as though by pernicious horses, holds to the right road, it will perform its function. Therefore, if

² Cf. Ovid, *Epistles from Pontus* 3.1.35.

³ Cf. Cicero, *The Republic* 2.41.68.

fear and desire are cast unto the earth, they become vices; but if they are referred to divine things they become virtues.

On the contrary, they hold parsimony in the place of virtue. If this is a desire of possessing, it cannot be a virtue, because it is wholly concerned with increasing or guarding earthly goods. We do not refer the highest good to the body, but we measure all duty by the saving of the soul alone. But if, as I showed above, we should not be sparing of patrimony so that we might uphold humaneness and justice, it is not a virtue to be frugal, a fact which the name deceives by its likeness to that virtue. Indeed, abstinence from pleasures is frugality, but it is a vice in this, because it flows from love of possessing, although pleasures must be refrained from and checked very slightly by money. For to use money sparingly, that is, moderately, is, as it were, a certain smallness of mind or a mark of one overfearful that it may fail him, or of one despairing that he can recover it, or of one not having contempt of earthly things.

Again, they call him who is not sparing of his personal wealth, prodigal. Thus, they distinguish a liberal man from a prodigal one: he is liberal who bestows bounty both well and to the deserving, and when it is fitting, and as much as is enough, but the prodigal pours forth on those who are not deserving, and when there is no need, and without regard to his personal wealth. What then? Shall we call him a prodigal who bestows food on the needy for the sake of mercy? But it matters much whether you are bountiful to harlots because of lust or to the wretched on account of humaneness; whether panderers or gamesters or procurers take your money, or whether you offer it to works of piety and to God; whether you spend it on your stomach in gluttony, or whether you lay it away in the treasury of justice. As it is a vice to spend it lavishly on evil ends, so it is a virtue to use it on good. If it is a virtue not to be sparing of wealth which can be recovered, that you may sustain the life of a man which cannot be recovered, then parsimony is a vice.

Therefore, I would say nothing else but that they are insane who deprive man, a gentle and social animal, of his name, and who, by tearing out those passions on which all humanity rests, want to lead him to an immobile stupor of mind, while they desire to free his spirit from disturbance, and, as they say, to make it quiet and tranquil. This is not only impossible, because his power and reason exist in movement, but it is not even necessary. For just as water which is always still and quiet is unhealthful and more disordered, so a mind unmoved and torpid is useless even to itself. Neither will it be able to protect life itself, because it will not do anything nor think anything, since thought itself is nothing other than the agitation of the mind.

Finally, those who lay claim for this immobility of soul wish to deprive the soul of life, since life is full of activity, and death is quiet. Certain things also they rightly hold as virtues, but they do not keep their measure. Constancy in virtue, not that we should resist those bringing injury upon us—for we must yield to them, and I will soon explain why this should be done—but that we should be deterred by no threats or punishments from those ordering us to go against the law of God and against justice from preferring the order of God to the order of man. It is, likewise, virtue to despise death, not that we should seek it and bring it upon ourselves willingly, as many of the greatest philosophers did, which is criminal and wicked, but that, when forced to abandon God and betray the faith, we should prefer to undergo death and defend liberty against the foolish and heartless violence of the impotent, and that we should provoke all the threats and terrors of the world with fortitude of mind. Thus, those things which others fear, pain and death, we should trample under foot with lofty and insuperable mind. This is virtue, this true constancy, to be protected and preserved in this way alone, so that no terror, no power may be able to turn us away from God. Therefore, that statement of Cicero's is true: 'No one can be just who fears death, pain, exile, or want.'⁴ So also is that

⁴ *On Duties* 2.11.38.

of Seneca in his works on moral philosophy: 'This is that honorable man, not distinguished by the cap or the purple or by the attendance of lictors, but by no means insignificant, who, when he saw death near him, was not so disturbed as though it were a new thing he saw, and whether torments had to be suffered in his whole body, or whether a flame was to be swallowed in his mouth, or his hands to be extended on a gibbet, he does not seek to know why he suffers but how well he may suffer.'⁵

He who worships God suffers these things, and he is not afraid. Therefore, he is just. From these things it is effected that whoever is a stranger to the religion of the one God is not able either to know the virtues at all or to grasp their very exact limits.

Chapter 18

But let us dismiss the philosophers who either knew nothing at all and hold that itself up as the highest knowledge, or who do not perceive even the things which they know, or who are ineptly and arrogantly foolish since they think that they know what they do not know. Therefore, that we may return to the proposed topic (for to us alone has the truth been revealed by God and wisdom sent from heaven), let us do what God, our Enlightener, orders. Let us support one another, and let us endure the labors of this life with mutual assistance, and let us not, however, if we do any good work, take any glory from it. For God warns that the worker of justice ought not to be boastful, lest he seem to have performed the work of mercy, not so much from a desire of obeying the heavenly commands as from one of pleasing, and lest he have already the price of glory which he has gained and so not receive the prize of that heavenly and divine reward.

The other things which the worshiper of God ought to observe are easy when those virtues have been attained. For

⁵ Frg. 124.

he would never lie for the sake of deceiving or harming. It is wrong for him who is eager for the truth to be false in any respect and to depart from that very truth which he follows. In this way of justice and of all the virtues, there is no place for a lie. And so that true and just wayfarer will not speak that sentiment of Lucilius: 'It is not my policy to lie to a friend and a close associate.'¹ But he will also consider that it is not for him to lie to an enemy or to one whom he does not know, nor will he ever commit the crime of having his tongue, 'the interpreter of the mind,'² at variance with his feeling and intention.

If he lends money, he should not exact usury, so that the benefit also which he brings to a necessity may be unharmed, and that he may keep himself away from what is another's. In this kind of office, he ought to be content with his own, for whom it would be fitting that he should not be sparing of his possessions even in other matters, so that he may do a good. But to receive back more than he might have given is unjust. Whoever does this plots in a certain way so that he may be enriched by another's necessity. But the just man will never pass over a chance of doing something merciful, nor will he stain himself with a complaint of this sort, but he will bring it about that without any loss of his own that very thing which he bestows will be numbered among good works.

Let him not take a gift from a poor man, so that if he himself has done anything, it may be a good act in this respect, that it was done gratuitously.

Let him answer with a blessing one who curses him; he himself should never curse, lest an evil word should proceed from the mouth of a man who worships the Good Word.

In fact, let him also be very careful not to ever make an enemy through his own fault; and if anyone should rise up so perverse as to do any injury to a good and just man, let him

¹ Frg. 140.

² Lucretius 6.1149.

bear it with clemency and moderation and not claim vengeance for himself, but reserve that to the judgment of God.

Let him always and everywhere guard innocence. This precept avails not to this only, that he himself should not inflict injury, but that if it is brought upon him, he should not vindicate himself. For there is the greatest and most fair Judge who sits in judgment, the Watcher and Witness of all things. Let him place Him before man; let him prefer Him to pronounce on his cause. No one can escape His sentence, neither by the pleading nor the favor of anyone.

Thus it happens that the just man is held in contempt by all, and since it will be thought that he cannot defend himself, he will be regarded as dull and inactive. But he who will get revenge on an enemy is judged strong; he is alert; all fear him; they revere him. However, even though that good man can be of help to many, they will yet look up to him who can harm rather than him who can help. But the depravity of men will not be able to make the just man depraved, from being eager to obey God and preferring to be despised, provided he always performs the office of good, never of evil. Cicero, in that same work *On Duties*, said: 'If anyone should wish to unravel the complicated notion of his soul let him teach himself that he is a good man who is of help to whomever he can, and who harms no one unless he himself is harassed by injury.'³ How he corrupts a true and simple statement by the addition of two words! For what had been the need of adding that 'unless harassed by injury'? Was it that he might attach vice to a good man as though it were a most disgraceful tail, and to cause him to have no part with patience, which is the greatest of all virtues? He said that a good man would harm if he had been harassed. Now from this very act, if he should do harm, he would of necessity lose the name of a good man. For it is no less an evil to pay back an injury than to inflict one. Whence come struggles among men; whence arise fights and contentions, unless it is the fact that

³ Cicero, *On Duties* 3.19.76.

impatience set against wickedness often stirs up the greatest tempests? But if you place against wickedness patience, and nothing truer can be found than this virtue, nothing worthier of man, it will be straightway extinguished, just as if you were to throw water on fire. If, however, that provocatrix, iniquity, has found an impatience comparable to herself, just as though dripping with oil, she will enkindle such a great fire that, not only some river, but an effusion of blood must extinguish it.

So there is great reason for the patience which the 'wise man' takes away from the good man. This alone brings it about that nothing of evil be done. If it is given to all, there will be no crime, no fraud in human affairs. What, then, is able to be so calamitous and so opposed to a good man as to give a curb to his anger which despoils him, not only of the name of a good man, but even a man, since to harm another, as he himself very truly says, is not according to the nature of man?⁴ If you bother cattle, they fight back with hoof or horn; and serpents and wild beasts, unless you pursue them to slay them, exhibit no concern; and to return to the examples of men, the unskilled and foolish also, whenever they receive an injury, are driven by blind and irrational fury and try to repay in turn those who harm them. In what respect, therefore, does a wise and good man differ from the foolish, unless it be because he possesses unconquered patience, which fools lack; unless it be because he knows how to rule himself and mitigate his wrath, which they cannot bridle because they need virtue?

Certainly, in this matter he was mistaken because, when he spoke of virtue, he thought that it was the part of virtue to conquer in any contention, nor could he see man succumbing in any way to grief and wrath, and indulging those emotions which he ought rather to resist, and rushing wherever iniquity provoked not to hold on to the office of virtue. He who strives to repay an injury throws himself out of the way to imitate the very one by whom he has been wounded. Thus, he who imitates evil can in no way be good. Therefore, by those two

⁴ *Ibid.* 3.5.25.

words he took away from a good and wise man the two greatest virtues: innocence and patience. But because he himself practiced that 'canine eloquence,' a term that Sallust relates was used by Appius, he wished man to live in a canine manner, that when harassed he might bite back.⁵ Where can a more fitting example be sought of how pernicious this paying back of insult is, and what great confusion it is wont to bring forth, than from that very sad case of the preceptor himself? For while he exulted in obeying these precepts of the philosophers, he lost himself. But if, although harassed by injury, he had held on to patience; if he had learned how to dissimulate; and that to bear contumely was the work of a good man; and if his impatience, levity, and insanity had not poured forth those noble orations inscribed with a foreign title,⁶ he would never have reddened the rostra, where he had been so flourishing before, with his head's blood, nor would that proscription have so utterly destroyed the republic.

Therefore, it is not the part of a wise and good man to wish to struggle and to give himself to danger, since, on the one hand, to win is not in our power, and on the other, every struggle is two-sided. It is the part of a wise and excellent man, however, not to wish to remove the adversary, which cannot be done without crime and danger, but the struggle itself, which can be done profitably and justly. Patience, then, must be regarded as the highest virtue, and in order that the just man gain this, God wished him, as was said above, to be despised as an inert or insipid man. For unless he shall have been afflicted with contumelies, it will not be known how much fortitude he possesses within him for restraining himself. But if, when harassed by injury, he begin to pursue the one who is hurting him, he has been conquered; but he who represses that movement by reason, clearly he is master of himself, he is able to rule himself. This withholding of one-

5 Cf. Sallust, *Histories* 2.37.

6 Cicero's speeches against Antony were called *Philippics* because of a similarity to those of Demosthenes against Philip of Macedon.

self is rightly called patience which is one virtue opposed to all vices and passions. This recalls a disturbed and wavering soul to its tranquility; this mitigates, this brings a man back to himself. And so, since it is impossible and useless to fight against nature, in order not to be upset at all, before that disturbance leaps forth unto harming which can happen very quickly, let it be put to rest. God charges us 'not to have the sun go down on our anger,'⁷ lest the witness of our madness depart.

Lastly, Marcus Tullius, contrary to his own teaching of which I spoke a little while ago,⁸ treated forgetfulness of injuries with greatest praise when he said to Caesar, 'I hope that you who are accustomed to forget nothing except injuries. . . .'⁹ If that one did this, a man very far removed, not only from heavenly, but even from common and civic justice, how much more ought we to do it, who are candidates, as it were, for immortality?

Chapter 19

While the Stoics try to root the passions out of man as though they were sicknesses, the Peripatetics oppose these and not only keep them, but even defend them and say that there is nothing innate in man which is not according to great wisdom and providence.¹ That would be right, indeed, if they knew the real terminuses of the individual things. And so they say that very wrath is the flint-stone of virtue, as though no one could bravely struggle against an enemy, against a foe, unless he should be stirred up by anger. By this they show plainly that they know neither what virtue is nor why God gave anger to man. If this has been so given to us by God, that we use it for killing men, what should be thought more savage

⁷ Cf. Eph. 4.26.

⁸ Cf. *On Duties* 3.19.76.

⁹ Cicero, *Ligarius* 12.35.

¹ Cf. Cicero, *The Prior Academics* 2.44.135; *Tusculans* 4.19.43.

than man; what more like the wild beasts than that animal which God made for communion and innocence?

There are three emotions which drive men headlong into all crimes: anger, desire, passion (or lust). For this reason the poets said that there were three Furies which attack the minds of men: anger seeks for revenge; desire riches; passion pleasures.² But for all of these God has set fixed limits. If they overstep these and begin to be too great, it is necessary that they deprave their nature and be turned into sicknesses and vices.

What these limits are, however, it is not a great task to show. Desire has been given to us for procuring those things which are necessary for life. Passion has been given for the propagation of the race. The emotion of anger is for checking the sins of those who are under our authority, that is, so that with stricter discipline the younger age might be formed to justice and probity. And unless it be restrained by fear, licence will bring forth boldness which goes out to all evil and crime. And so, as it is just and necessary to use anger toward the young, so it is pernicious and impious to use it toward equals. It is impious because humaneness is violated; because it is necessary to lose to those fighting back or to perish. That this, however, which I said, is the reason why the emotion of anger has been given to man can be known from the precepts of God Himself who commands that we be not angered at those who curse and harm us,³ but that we should always keep our hands upon the young,⁴ that is, that we should correct those who sin with constant chastisements, lest they be brought up to evil ways and nourished unto vice by useless love and too much indulgence.

But those teachers, inexperienced in these matters and ignorant of reason, did away with those emotions which were given to man for good uses, and they digress farther than reason demands. So they live unjustly and impiously. They

² Cf. Cicero, *The Republic* 2.41.68; *Tusculans* 3.11.25. Cf. also Isidore, *Origins* 8.11.95.

³ Cf. Matt. 5.11; 5.44.

⁴ Cf. especially Eccles. 7.25; 30.1; Eph. 6.1; Col. 3.20.

use anger against their equals. From this are born disagreements, expulsions, wars against justice. They use desire for piling up wealth. Hence, frauds, robberies, all kinds of crimes have arisen. They use passion only for securing pleasure; in this way, then, disgraces, adulteries, all defilements have come about. Whoever, therefore, has kept these emotions within their bounds (and those who know not God are not able to do this) is patient; he is strong; he is just.

Chapter 20

It remains for me to speak briefly against the pleasures of the five senses. The size of the book itself is now demanding moderation. Since all of these pleasures are vicious and deadly, they ought to be conquered and oppressed by virtue, or, what I said awhile ago about the emotions, recalled to their reason or purpose. The other living creatures feel nothing except the one pleasure which pertains to generation. Therefore, they use senses according to the necessity of their nature. They see to it that they seek after those things which are necessary for protecting life. They hear each other and learn to recognize and tell themselves apart so that they may be able to congregate. They find out what things are useful for food from their odor, or they learn it from their taste. What is unfit for use they spit out and reject. They measure the function of eating and drinking by the fullness of their stomachs. But to man the Providence of the most inventive Artificer has given infinite pleasure, falling even into vice, because he proposed virtue to him which always would fight with pleasure as with a domestic foe. Cicero, in the *Cato Major*, says this: 'Violations of honor and adulteries and all disgraces are excited by no other enticements save that of pleasure. And although nature or some god had given man nothing more outstanding than his mind, to this divine gift

and power nothing is so inimical as pleasure. When passion dominates, there is no place for temperance, and in the kingdom of pleasure virtue cannot stand.¹ On the contrary, God has given virtue for this reason, that it might attack and conquer pleasure and encompass it within a prescribed limit as it goes out from its assigned boundaries, lest it subject man weakened by its delights, and hold him captive to its sway, and punish him with everlasting death.

The pleasure of the eyes is varied and manifold. It is derived from the sight of things which are delectable in the use of men or in nature or in work. The philosophers supported this most rightly. For they say that to be an engraver is much more noble and worthy of man than to regard engravings, and to admire this work as very beautiful which is adorned with the gleaming lights of stars as though with flowers, rather than painted imitations and things marked with jewels. But when they have encouraged us eloquently to despise earthly things and aroused us to the sight of heaven, however, they do not despise the public spectacles. So they are delighted with them and freely take part in them. Since these are very great inciters of the vices and are very powerful for the corrupting of the mind, they ought to be removed by us because they not only add nothing to the happy life, but also cause much harm. For, although a man be condemned deservedly, whoever reckons it a pleasure for him to be strangled in his sight defiles his own conscience, just as surely as if he were a spectator and participant of a murder which is performed secretly. They call these games, however, in which human blood is spilled. So far has humanity departed from men that, when they kill the very life of men, they think that they are playing, but they are more harmful than all those whose blood they use for their pleasure.

I ask now whether they can be pious and just men who, not only allow those who are set up under the mark of death and who plead for mercy to be killed, but who even demand

¹ Cicero, *On Old Age* 12.40 f.

it; and who, neither sated with wounds nor content with blood, bring to the death cruel and inhuman assent. Why, they even order those struck and lying prostrate to be sought again and have their bodies torn apart by blows lest anyone delude them by feigning death. They are angry, too, with those who fight in the arena, unless one of the two is quickly slain; and, as if they were thirsting for human blood, they hate delays. They demand that others, more recent and equal to them be given, so that they may feast their eyes as soon as possible. Steeped in this practice they have lost humaneness. So they spare not even the innocent, but they practice upon all what they have learned in the butchering of the evil. Of this public homicide, therefore, it is not fitting for those who strive to hold the way of justice to be sharers and accomplices. For when God forbids killing, He not only prohibits us from free-booting, which is not permitted even by public laws, but He also advises that those things also, which are regarded as lawful among men, should not be done. So, neither will it be permitted a just man, whose service is justice herself, to enter military service,² nor can he accuse anyone of a capital crime, because there is no difference whether you kill a man with a sword or a word, since the killing itself is prohibited.

Therefore, in this command of God, no exception whatsoever must be made. It is always wrong to kill a man whom God has intended to be a sacrosanct creature. Let no one, then, think that it is to be conceded even, that newly born children may be done away with, an especially great impiety! God breathes souls into them for life, not for death. Yet men, lest they stain their hands with that which is a crime, deny light not given by them to souls still fresh and simple. Does someone think that they will be sparing of a stranger's blood who are not of their own? These are without any question criminal and unjust.

What of those whom a false piety forces to expose? Are

² One of the greatest reasons for which Christianity was considered a civil offense was this, that the Christians refused to take part in state wars.

they able to be judged innocent who cast their own members as prey for dogs and kill whatever is in them more cruelly than if they had strangled it? Who would doubt that he is impious who gives place to alien pity? Who, although there happens to him what he wished, that he be nourished, has made over his blood to servitude or to a house of ill-repute? Who does not understand or who is ignorant of what things can happen and are accustomed to happen to both sexes on account of mistakes? The example of even one, Oedipus, confounded by a double crime, makes this known.³ It is as nefarious to explain as to kill. Parricides complain of the narrowness of their opportunities and pretend that they are not able to provide for bringing up several children, as if in truth, the opportunities are in the power of those possessing them, or as if God does not daily make the rich poor and the poor rich. So, if someone is not able to bring up children on account of poverty, it is more satisfactory that he refrain from intercourse with his wife rather than that he corrupt the works of God with defiled hands.

Therefore, if to commit homicide is in nowise permitted, it is not by any means allowed to be present at it, lest any blood stain the conscience, since that blood is manifested to the people. In plays, too, I know not whether there is more vicious corruption. Even the comedies speak of the defiling of virgins or the love affairs of harlots, and the more eloquent are those who have fashioned those tales of crime, the more do they persuade by the elegance of their sentences, and the more easily will their numerous ornate verses stick in the memory of their hearers. Likewise, the tragic histories put before the eyes the murders and incests of evil kings and present 'elevated' crimes. The shameless motions of the actors also; what else do they teach and arouse but the passions? Their enervated bodies, softened to womanish step and apparel, belie shameless women with their dishonorable gestures.⁴

³ Oedipus was guilty of killing his father and marrying his mother.

⁴ All the actors of ancient plays were males, and some of these were trained to play women's roles.

What shall I say of the mimes which put forward the training of seducers, which teach adulteries, while they present the fiction, and draw out from images to the real things? What do youths or maidens do when they see that these things are done and willingly watched without shame by all?⁵ They are certainly advised as to what they can do, and they are inflamed with passion which is especially aroused by the sight, and each one, according to sex, puts himself or herself in those imaginary circumstances, and they approve of them while they laugh. So more corrupt through the vices that adhere, they return to their chambers. And not boys only who should not be imbued with premature vices, but even old men for whom sinning at this age is not fitting.

The purpose of circus games also aims at what else but levity, vanity, and madness? Minds are stirred into fury with as great an impetus as people rush there, so that those who come for the sake of watching exhibit more of a spectacle when they begin to shout and get carried away and leap about.

All spectacles, then, ought to be avoided, not only lest any of their vices seep into hearts which ought to be quiet and peaceful, but lest the customariness of this pleasure charm us and turn us away from God and good works. For the celebration of the games are feasts of the gods since they have been established on account of their birthdays or the dedications of new temples. Originally, indeed, the hunting parks, which are called gifts, were attributed to Saturn; the theater plays to Liber; the circuses to Neptune. Little by little, however, the same honor began to be attributed to the other gods, and the individual games were consecrated by their names, as Sennius Capito explains in his book on *Spectacles*.⁶ If, therefore, anyone takes part in the spectacles which are attended for a religious purpose, he has departed from the worship of God

5 For similar treatment of these topics and like stress on the ill effect of such entertainments, cf. Minucius Felix c. 37.11,12; Cyprian, *To Donatus* c. 8.

6 Sennius Capito was a Roman grammarian. Gellius, in his *Attic Nights*, quotes him.

and has gone over to the gods whose birthdays and feasts he celebrated.

Chapter 21

The pleasure of the ears is drawn from the sweetness of voices and songs. This is, indeed, as vicious as is that delight of the eyes of which we have spoken. Who would not think him who practices arts at home luxurious and evil? But it makes no difference whether you practice the luxuriousness alone at home or in the theater with everybody. The spectacles have been mentioned already. One thing remains to be refuted by us, that we be not taken by those things which penetrate to the inner sense. For all those things which lack words, that is, the sweet sounds of air and bowstrings, can be easily despised because they do not remain nor can they be written. But the well composed song, or an oration running along with smoothness, seizes the minds and impels them where it will.¹ Thus, men of letters who have approached the religion of God, being confounded by some unskilled instructor, believe the less. For accustomed to sweet and polished speeches and songs, they spurn the simple and direct speech of the divine writings as mean.² They seek that which may please the sense of hearing, for whatever is sweet persuades, and settles deep within the mind while it delights.

Is God, then, the Artificer of mind and voice and tongue, not able to speak eloquently? No, in fact, in His supreme Providence He wished those things which are divine to be without alloy, so that all men might understand what He was speaking to all. Therefore, let him who desires the truth, who does not wish to cast himself aside from it, throw away all inimical and harmful pleasures, which vitiate the soul as do sweet foods the body. Let true things be preferred to false,

¹ Cf. Cicero, *On Oratory* 1.8.30.

² Cf. the reaction of St. Augustine to the plain style of the Scriptures in *Confessions* 3.5; also his *On Christian Doctrine* 4.5.6; 20.

eternal ones to those that are short, useful to pleasant. Let nothing, therefore, be pleasant to sight except that which is just, which you see is done piously; and let nothing be sweet to the hearing except that which nourishes the soul and makes you better. This sense, especially, must not be twisted to vice which was given to us for this reason, that we might perceive the teaching of God.

And so if it is a pleasure to hear chants and songs, let it be a joy to hear and sing the praises of God. This is the true pleasure which is the companion and associate of virtue; this is not faltering and short, as are those pleasures which are sought by those who serve the body like the beasts, but it is perpetual and gives delight without any interruption. If anyone goes beyond its limits and seeks from pleasure nothing other than pleasure itself, he plots death, because as perpetual life rests in virtue, so is death in pleasure. For whoever prefers temporal things will lack those which are eternal, and whoever places earthly things first will not possess those which are eternal.

Chapter 22

As to the pleasure of taste and smell, which two senses pertain to the body only, there is nothing which is to be disputed by us; unless, perhaps someone exacts us to say that it is base for a wise and good man to serve his stomach and appetite, to go along dripping with perfumed ointments or wreathed with flowers. Surely, one who does these things is foolish and silly and worthless, for not even the odor of virtue has touched him. Perhaps someone might say, 'Why, then, have those things been made except that we might enjoy them?' Now it has been said often¹ that there would be no virtue unless one had what might oppress it. So God made all things for the arrangement of the struggle between the two.

¹ Cf. for example Bk. II, 17.1; III, 29.13-20; V, 7.3-10; 22.11-17; VI, 3.4; 5.12; 15.5-9.

Therefore, those attractions are the arms of pleasures of that one whose one work is to attack virtue and to shut out virtue from men. With these blandishments and delights he tickles souls, for he knows that pleasure is the fashioner of death. As God calls man to life only through the labor of virtue, so he calls to death through the charms of pleasure; and as we arrive at the true good through deceiving evils, so true evil is reached through deceiving goods. Therefore, those charms must be avoided as though snares and nets, lest, taken by the wantonness of the pleasures, we might be reduced under the sway of death with the body itself to which we have delivered ourselves.

Chapter 23

I come now to that pleasure which is received from touch, which is a sense of the whole body, in fact. But I do not think that I ought to speak about ornaments and clothing but about passion alone, which must be especially restrained since it especially harms. When God invented the plan of the two sexes, He placed in them the desire of each other and joy in union. So He put in bodies the most ardent desire of all living things, so that they might rush most avidly into these emotions and be able by this means to propagate and increase their kind. This desire and longing is found more vehement and more keen in man, either because He wished the number of men to be greater, or because He gave the power to man alone, so that it might be to his praise and glory in refraining from pleasures and in self-restraint.

That adversary of ours knows how great is the force of this desire, which certain ones preferred to call a necessity, and he transfers it from a right and good use to one depraved and evil. He puts in illicit desires, so that the foreign ones contaminate those which are proper, which it is all right to have without any fault. He casts before the eyes forms by which

they can easily be enraged, and he suggests fomentations, and applies food for vice. Then, in our innermost parts, he sets going and incites stimuli, and he arouses and inflames that natural ardor, until he deceives man so caught and implicated. And lest there be anyone who through fear of punishments would keep away from another, he has established also houses of ill-repute and made public the shame of unfortunate women, so that he might hold in mockery those who do it as much as those who have to suffer it.¹ He has plunged in these obscenities, as in a whirlpool of filth, souls destined for sanctity; he has extinguished shame; he has berated modesty.

The same one has even joined males and has contrived abominable intercourse against nature and against the institute of God. Thus, he has imbued men and armed them for all crime. What can be holy to those men who supplied their passion with those of tender age, souls needing protection, and who destroyed and defiled them? This crime because of its magnitude cannot be discussed. I can call those nothing more than impious and parricides, men whom sex as given by God does not suffice, but who also profanely and wantonly abuse their own sex. Yet these practices among them are regarded as light and sort of honorable.

What shall I say of those who practice, not abominable passion, but rather insanity? I am ashamed to mention it, but what should we believe will happen to those who are not ashamed to do it? Yet it should be mentioned, because it is done. I speak of those whose most loathsome passion and execrable madness spares not even the head. With what words shall I attack this, and with what indignation inveigh against such a foul crime? The magnitude of the crime overcomes the function of the tongue.

When, therefore, passion brings forth these works and designs these crimes, we ought to be armed against it with the greatest virtue. Whoever is not able to restrain those emotions should hold them within the prescribed rights of lawful

¹ Cf. Isidore, *Origins* 18.42.2.

marriage, so that he may attain that which he avidly seeks and yet not fall into sin. For why do men wish themselves lost? Surely, pleasure follows honorable works. If they seek this of themselves, they may have just and legitimate enjoyment. But if some necessity prohibits, then, in truth, must virtue be especially applied, so that continency may struggle with desire. And not only is it not lawful to touch what belongs to another's marriage bed, but God also charges us and teaches us that we must abstain from public and common bodies, for when two bodies have been joined together, they are made one.² Thus, he who has immersed himself in the mire must be smeared with filth. Indeed, the body can be quickly washed; the mind, however, stained by the contagion of a shameless body, cannot be purged from that defilement which clings to it except by the penance of a long time and many good works.

It is necessary, therefore, for each one to propose to himself that the union of the two sexes has been given for the sake of generation, and that this law has been set in these living powers that they may prepare for succession. Just as God gave us eyes, not that we might look at and seize pleasure, but that we might see on account of them the actions which pertain to the necessity of life, so the genital parts of the body, which their very name teaches, have been received by us for no other reason than the procreation of offspring. We must obey this divine law with the greatest devotion. Let all who will profess to be the disciples of God be so checked and so trained that they can control themselves. But those who indulge in pleasures, who are subservient to passion, make over their souls to their bodies and condemn them to death, because they have devoted themselves to the body, and death has power over this. Let each one, then, as far as he is able, train himself to modesty, cultivate shame, protect chastity of both conscience and mind. Let him not only obey the public laws, but let him who follows the law of God be above all laws. If

² Cf. 1 Cor. 6.16.

he gets accustomed to these goods, then, he will be ashamed to deviate to worse things. Let only the right and good things please, for these are more pleasant to the better people than depraved and ignoble things are to the worse.

I have not yet gone through all the offices of chastity. God limits them, not only within private walls, but even by the precepts of the marriage bed, so that when anyone has a wife, he may not wish to have besides a slave or free concubine, but he must keep the faith of his marriage contract. For such is not the case, as is the interpretation of public law, that she alone is the adulteress who has another man, while the male is free from the charge of adultery, though he have many mistresses. The divine law so joins two with equal right into a marriage, which is two in one flesh,³ that whoever breaks apart the joining of the body is regarded as an adulterer. And it was not for any other reason that God, although He made the other animals fight away the males when the fetus was conceived, made the woman alone of them all submissive to her husband. Surely, it was lest passion should force the husbands away from pregnant women to seek other satisfaction, and they would not, then, keep the honor of chastity.

Neither would a woman have the virtue of chastity if she were not able to sin, for who would say that a dumb animal is chaste because, when the fetus is conceived, she keeps off the male?⁴ She acts thus for this reason, that she must necessarily come into pain and danger if she admits him. It is no praise, therefore, not to do what you are not able to do.⁵ So modesty is praised in man because it is not natural, but voluntary.

Faith, then, must be kept with the other by each party in a marriage; in fact, the wife is to be taught by the example of continence to act chastely. It is evil to exact that which you yourself are not able to exhibit. This iniquity assuredly brought it about that there were adulteries, women bearing it ill that they were keeping faith with men not exhibiting

³ Cf. Matt. 19.4-6.

⁴ Cf. Isidore, *Origins* 11.2.19.

⁵ Cf. Pseudo-Seneca, *On Customs* 4.

mutual love. Finally, there is no adulteress of such a lost sense of shame that she does not hold forth this reason for her vices, that by sinning she is not doing an injury but repaying one. Quintilian expressed this very well when he said, 'A man who does not keep away from another's marriage is not a guardian of his own either.'⁶ They are connected by nature. For a man concerned about violating the wives of others cannot be free to attend to his own domestic sanctity; and, when a wife falls into such a marriage, aroused by the very example, she thinks that she should either imitate it or get revenge.

We must take care, therefore, not to give opportunity for vices by our intemperance, but let the customs of the two get used to each other and bear the yoke with like minds. Let us consider ourselves in the other's place. For the height of justice almost consists in this: that you do not do to another what you yourself would not want to suffer from another.⁷

These are the things which are prescribed by God for continency. But, however, lest anyone think that he is able to circumscribe the divine precepts, there are added these points, that all calumny and chance for fraud be removed; he is an adulterer who takes a wife who has been sent away by her husband; and so is he who has, aside from the crime of adultery, put a wife away that he may take another. God did not intend for that 'one flesh' to be separated and torn apart. Furthermore, not only adultery must be avoided, but even the very consideration of it, lest anyone look upon another woman and desire her in his heart.⁸ The mind becomes adulterous if it has fashioned for itself even an image of this pleasure. For it is truly the mind which sins, which embraces in thought the fruit of immoderate passion; in it is the crime, in it all fault. Even though the body be smeared with no stain, the condition of purity does not exist, however, if the

⁶ Cf. *The Declamations of Quintilian* (ed. by Ritter) Preface, p. iii.

⁷ Cf. Matt. 7.12; also Publilius Syrus 2; *The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles* 1.2.

⁸ Cf. Matt. 5.28.

soul is defiled; nor can chastity seem unmarred when desire has spoiled the conscience.

In truth, no one should think it difficult to impose a bridle on pleasure and to enclose a roaming and wandering spirit, as it were, within the bounds of chastity and purity, since it has been proposed to men to conquer it; and since very many have retained a blessed and uncorrupted integrity of body; and since there are many who now enjoy most happily this heavenly kind of life. But God does not command that this be done as though it were binding, since it is necessary that men be born, but it is as though He allows it to be done. For He knows how much necessity He has put upon the emotions. 'If anyone will be able to do this,' He says, 'he will have an exceeding and incomparable reward.'⁹ This kind of continency is, as it were, the peak and consummation of all the virtues. If anyone can lean toward this and strive after it, the Lord will own him as His servant; the Master will recognize this man as His disciple. This man will triumph over the earth. He will be very like to God who has caught the virtue of God. Truly, these things seem difficult, but we are speaking about him for whom a way is being prepared to heaven by the treading under foot of earthly things. For because virtue consists in the knowledge of God, all things are burdensome while you do not know Him; when you know Him, they are easy. We who are tending toward the supreme good must go through these difficulties.

Chapter 24

Let not anyone fail, however, or lose hope in himself, if conquered by desire, or driven by passion, or deceived by error, or compelled by force, he has fallen into the way of injustice. For he can be led back and set free if he repents of his deeds and, turning toward better things, makes satisfaction

⁹ Cf. 1 Cor. 7.7,8; Matt. 19.12.

to God. Cicero did not think that this could be done. These are his words in the third book of the *Academics*: 'If it were permitted to those who have erred on the way, thus following a devious route, to correct their error by penance, the emendation of rashness would be very easy.'¹ It is certainly permitted. If we take up our children again, and cherish and embrace them when we see them repent of their faults, and when we think that they have corrected them and cast them from them, why should we not hope that the clemency of our true Father can be won by repentance? The same Lord and most indulgent Father, therefore, promises that He will remit the sins of those repenting of them, and that He will wipe away all the iniquities of him who will begin at length to work justice. Just as the probity of a past life is of no avail to one living badly, because the supervening injustice has destroyed the works of justice, so former sins do not stand in the way of one who has been corrected, because supervening justice has abolished the stain of previous life.

Therefore, he who repents of his deed understands his earlier mistake, and so the Greeks use a better and more significant term in *metanoian* than we can express in the Latin with *resipiscentiam*.² For he repents and recovers his mind, as it were, from insanity, who is ashamed of his error and chastises himself for his folly, and confirms his soul for living more rightly. Then, he is especially watchful of this, that he should not be entangled in the same snares again. The dumb animals, too, are taken by fraud. If they have extricated themselves somehow and gained escape, they become more cautious afterwards, and they always avoid all those things in which they perceived guiles and treachery. Thus, penance makes man cautious and diligent for avoiding the sins into which he has once fallen by fraud. For no one can be so prudent, so circumspect as not to fall sometime. For this reason, God,

¹ *Posterior Academics* frg. 16.

² The Greek word *metanoian* signifies literally a 'change of mind,' more meaningful surely than the Latin *resipiscentia* for our word, *repentance*.

knowing our frailty, has on account of his loving kindness opened to man the port of salvation, so that the medicine of penance might come to the help of this necessity to which our frailty is subject. Therefore, let whoever has wandered astray, retrace his path, and as soon as possible recover and reform himself. 'But to retrace one's steps and to escape to the upper air, this is toil, this is labor.'³

For though these delightful pleasures are but slightly touched upon, men can scarcely be torn away from them. They would follow the right more easily if they had not touched upon their sweetness. But let them withdraw from this evil service. All error will be forgiven them if they correct their error with a better life. Nor should anyone think that he is gaining if he has no consciousness of crime. For He in whose sight we live knows all things, and even if we are able to hide from all men, we cannot shut out God, to whom nothing can be hidden, nothing secret. Seneca terminated his *Exhortations* with a marvelous statement: 'There is a great power,' he said, 'and I know not what greater one can be imagined to whom we bestow attention by living. Let us prove ourselves to him. It is of no value to have a closed up conscience. We are open unto god.'⁴

What more true could be said by him who knows God than was said by that man ignorant of the true religion? For he expressed the majesty of God by saying something greater than the thought of human mind could take. And he touched upon the very font of truth by realizing that the life of men was not idle and superficial, as the Epicureans hold, but that service was rendered by them to God by their living, if they lived justly and piously. He could have been a true worshiper of God if someone had shown him the way, and he would surely have despised Zeno and his master, Sotio, if he had found a guide of true wisdom. 'Let us prove ourselves to him,' he says—actually, a heavenly prayer except that a confession

³ Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.128,129.

⁴ Frg. 24.

of his ignorance went before it. 'There is no advantage in having a closed up conscience; we are open to God.' Therefore, there is no place for lying, no place for dissimulation. The eyes of men are held off by walls, but the divine glance of God cannot be kept away even from the innermost regions of the heart, but, on the contrary, He beholds and knows the whole man.

In the beginning of that same work Seneca says: 'What are you doing? What do you contrive? What are you hiding? Your guard follows you. Travel draws one away from you; death, another; ill health, a third. This one stays fast, whom you can never be without. Why select a hiding place and remove witnesses? If you think that it has happened to you that you escape the eyes of all, you are mad. What good is it for you not to have a witness since you have a conscience?'⁵

No less wonderfully about conscience and God did Tullius write. 'He was to be mindful,' he said, 'that he had god as a witness, that is, as I believe, his own mind, than which god himself has given nothing more divine to man.'⁶ Likewise, when he spoke of the just and good man, he said: 'Such a man will dare not only not to do, but not even to think of anything which he would not dare to publicize.'⁷

Let us, then, cleanse our conscience which is pervious to the eyes of God, and, as the same writer says, 'Let us always so live as if we thought we were to render an account.'⁸ And let us think that at every moment, as he said, we are not 'in some theater of this world'⁹ watched by men, but that we are being observed from above by Him who will be both judge and witness. Nor will it be permitted anyone to deny his deed to Him when He demands an account of our lives. Therefore, it is more satisfying either to avoid conscience or to open our minds willingly and pour out the evil from

⁵ Frg. 14.

⁶ Cicero, *On Duties* 3.10.44.

⁷ *Ibid.* 3.19.77.

⁸ *Ibid.* 2 *Verrine* 11.28.

⁹ *Ibid.* *On Duties* 5.14.35.

opened wounds. For no one else can cure them but only that One who restored the power to walk to the lame and sight to the blind, who cleansed leprous bodies and raised the dead.¹⁰

He will extinguish the fire of desire; He will extirpate passion; He will withdraw envy, mitigate wrath, and give true and lasting soundness. All must seek after this medicine, since the soul is beset with greater perils than the body, and cure must be applied to its latent sickness as quickly as possible. For, even if someone does enjoy the clear vision of the eyes, though his members are all whole and the health of his entire body very strong, still I would not say that he is sound if he is carried away by anger, puffed up and swollen with pride; if he serves passion and is inflamed with desires. Rather, the one who does not set his eyes on another's felicity; who does not admire wealth; who regards another's wife sacredly; who covets nothing whatsoever, yearns after no one else's things, envies no one; who does not disdain anyone; who is humble, merciful, kindly, meek, humane, keeps perpetual peace in his soul, is a sound man; he is just; he is perfect.

Whoever, then, obeys all these heavenly commands is the true worshiper of God. His sacrifices are meekness of soul, an innocent life, and good deeds. He who displays all of these makes a sacrifice as often as he does something good and pious. For God does not desire a victim neither of a dumb animal nor of blood and death, but that of a man and his life. For this sacrifice there is no need of sacred boughs nor of purifying heat, nor of clumps of earth which are truly very empty, but of that which is produced from the depths of the soul. And so upon the altar of God which is truly very great, and which, placed in the heart of man, cannot be stained with blood, there is placed justice, patience, faith, innocence, chastity, and abstinence.¹¹ This is the truest rite, this is 'that law of God,' as it was said by Cicero, 'outstanding and divine, which always orders right and noble things and forbids the depraved and

¹⁰ Cf. Matt. 11.5.

¹¹ Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 8.481-498; cf. also Vergil, *Aeneid* 8.271-272.

base.¹² One who obeys this most holy and most certain law must live justly and lawfully. I have set down a few headings of this law, because I promised that I would say only those things which would place the climax on virtue and justice. If anyone wishes to comprehend all of these matters, let him seek from the font itself whence that stream has flowed to us.

Chapter 25

Now let us say a few things about sacrifice itself. 'Ivory,' says Plato, 'is not a chaste gift for God.'¹ What is, then? Is some precious material, painted or woven? No, indeed; whatever can be corrupted, whatever can be taken away is no chaste gift for God. But, as he saw this, that is not fitting for something which is from a dead body to be offered to the living, why did he not see also this, that a corruptible gift should not be offered to the Incorruptible? How much better and more truly Seneca put it when he said the following: 'Do you wish to think of a god great and calm, fearful, with gentle majesty, friendly and always nearby, not to be worshiped with immolations nor with much blood—for what pleasure is there in the slaughter of undeserving victims?—but with pure mind, with good and upright intention? For temples are not to be raised unto his honor by the piling of rocks to great height. Worship must be paid in each one's heart.'² Garments, then, and gems, and other things which are valued at a price, if anyone thinks them dear to God, he has clearly no idea of what God is. He thinks that the very things, for the despising of which a man will be properly praised, are a source of pleasure to Him. What is chaste, therefore, what worthy of God except what He has demanded as His own in the divine law?

¹² From the Incomplete Works, frg. 13; cf. also *The Laws* 1.6.18; 2.4.8.

¹ *Laws* XII, 956 A; cf. Cicero, *On Laws* 2.18.45.

² Frg. 123.

There are two things which ought to be offered: the gift and the sacrifice; gift in perpetuity, sacrifice for a time. But among those who in no way understand the notion of divinity, a gift is whatever is made of gold and silver; also, whatever is woven of purple and silk, and the sacrifice is the victim and whatever things are burned on the altar. God, however, does not use either, since He is incorruptible, and those things are wholly corruptible. There, the two which are to be offered to God and which He is to use (the gift and sacrifice) are incorruptible. The gift is the integrity of the mind; the sacrifice, praise and a hymn. For if God is not seen, He is to be worshiped by those things which are not seen. No other religion, therefore, is true, except that which consists of virtue and justice.

Now how God makes use of the justice of man is easy to understand. If a man is just when he gains immortality, he will serve God forever. Both the old philosophers and also Cicero suspect that men are born only for justice. Discoursing on law Cicero said: 'Of all things which are treated in the discussions of learned men, surely nothing is more outstanding than that it is clearly understood that we were born for justice.'³ We ought, therefore, to present and to offer to God this alone for the acquiring of which He gave us life. How very true is this double kind of sacrifice Hermes Trismegistus is a suitable witness, for his word is not incongruous with ours, that is, with the prophets in matter as well as in words. Concerning justice he spoke thus: 'Adore and worship this word, son. The one worship of god is not to be evil.'⁴ Also in that completed speech, when he had heard Asclepius seeking from his son whether it pleases his father to be offered incense and other perfumes used for the worship of the god, he cried out: 'Be well advised, O Asclepius. It is the greater impiety to bring into the mind any such thing about that one and singular good. These things and things like to them are not appropriate

³ *On Laws* 1.10.28.

⁴ *Poemander*, c. 12.23.

for him. For he is full of all things which are and he needs nothing of all that is. Giving thanks, then, let us adore him. Benediction alone is his sacrifice.⁵

Therefore, sacrifice must be made to God by the word, since 'The word is God,'⁶ as He Himself says. So the highest rite of worshipping God is praise from the mouth of the just man directed to God. In order, however, that it may be acceptable to God, this must be done with humility and fear and the greatest devotion, lest anyone flaunting confidence in integrity and innocence might incur the crime of pride and arrogance, and thereby lose the grace of virtue. But in order that he may be dear to God and lack all stain, let him always implore the mercy of God and pray for nothing else than the forgiveness of his sins, even though there be none. If he desires something else, there is no need of words for One who knows what we wish. If anything good happens to him, let him give thanks; if anything evil, let him make satisfaction and acknowledge that it has happened to him on account of his sins. And, nevertheless, let him give thanks even in evils, and in prosperity make reparation, that he may remain the same, stable, immutable, and unshaken.⁷ And let him not think that he must do this only in a temple, but also at home and even in his very bedroom. Finally, let him have God always with him, honored in his heart, since he himself is a temple of God. And if he serves God, his Father and Lord, with this assiduousness, with this attention, with this devotion, then, his justice is consummate and perfect. Whoever will have held to this, he, as we have claimed before, has yielded to God; he has fulfilled religion and his duty.

⁵ Cf. Pseudo-Apuleius, *Asclepius* c. 41.

⁶ Cf. John 1.1.

⁷ Cf. Oracle of Apollo given above in Bk. I, ch. 7.

BOOK SEVEN

ON THE BLESSED LIFE

Chapter 1

IT HOLDS WELL; the foundations have been laid,¹ as the distinguished orator says. We have not only laid the foundations which were firm and suitable for completing the work, but we have brought the entire structure almost up to its conclusion by great and vigorous efforts. There remains that which is much easier, either to cover it, or adorn it. Without this part of the work, however, the earlier efforts are not useful and are unpleasant. What is the good of being set free from false religions or of understanding the true one? What advantage to see through the vanity of false wisdom or to learn which is true? What, I say, is the point in defending that heavenly justice? Why hold on to the worship of God in great difficulties? What is the use of the highest virtue unless the divine reward of perpetual beatitude follows it?

We must treat of this reward in this book so that all the topics previously discussed will not seem ineffectual and fruitless, if we leave as uncertain that for which those subjects are undertaken. And we write this book also so that no one may think that such labors are for no purpose, because he may have lost confidence in their heavenly reward which God has determined for him who will have despised the good, sweet things of life for the sake of virtue alone and unadorned. Let us work enough for this topic, too, both with testimony from

¹ Cicero, *Pro Murena* 6.14; cf. also Salvian, *The Governance of God* 3.1.1.

the divine writings and also with probable proofs, so that it may be fairly clear that future goods ought to be preferred to present ones, the divine to the earthly, and everlasting ones to those of short duration, since the rewards of vices are temporal, those of virtue, everlasting.

I will explain, therefore, the plan of the world, so that it may be easily understood both when and how it was brought about by God, which Plato, when he discussed the making of the world, was able neither to know nor to explain.² For, indeed, he did not know the heavenly mystery, which is not learned except from the prophets and from God as teacher, and, therefore, he said it was 'made forever.' This is far removed from the true explanation, because whatever is of a solid and heavy consistency, as it took beginning at some time, must so receive an end. Now Aristotle, since he did not see how such a great magnitude of things could perish and wished to escape this prescription, said that the world had always been and always would be.³ Then he straightway saw nothing, since it is necessary that whatever is have a beginning at some time, and nothing at all could be unless it began. For when we see the earth, water, and fire, which are parts of the world, to be sure, disappear, become consumed, and extinguished, it is understood that the whole is mortal whose members are mortal. Thus it is that whatever can come to an end has been born or begun.

Everything which comes under the sight of the eyes must be both a body, as Plato said,⁴ and soluble. Epicurus, then, on the authority of Democritus, was truly versed on this point. He said that it had begun at one time and would come to extinction at some time. However, he was not able to render any account either for what causes or at what time this such great work would be resolved.⁵ Because God has revealed this to us, we do not get to it by conjectures but by heavenly

2 Cf. Cicero, *Prior Academics* 2.37.118.

3 *Ibid.* 38.119.

4 *Phaedo* 80 C.

5 Cf. Epicurus, frg. 304.

tradition. We will seriously try to teach, so that it may finally appear to those zealous for the truth, that the philosophers neither saw nor comprehended truth, and that they were so slightly fragrant that they in no way whatever realized whence that odor, so sweet and so pleasant, of wisdom flowed to them.

Meanwhile, I think it necessary to give advice to those who will read, because depraved and vicious minds will not understand at all these teachings of ours which we pass on, for their keenness is dulled by their earthly desires which weigh down their senses and render them weak. Or even if they do understand, they will dissimulate, however, and will not want these things to be true, because they are being thereby drawn from vices; and with awareness they favor evils by whose sweetness they are enticed, and they desert the path of virtue by whose bitterness they are offended. For because they burn with avarice and a certain unquenchable thirst for riches; because they cannot spend their lives in the tenuous cult of sellings and lavish givings which they love, without doubt they prefer that to be feigned by which they are forced to renounce their desires. Likewise, those who, aroused by the stimuli of the passions, rush as the poet says, 'into fury and fire,'⁶ say, of course, that we advance incredible ideas, because the precepts of continence wound their ears, precepts which keep them away from their pleasures to which they have committed both souls and bodies. Those who, puffed up by ambition or inflamed with the love of power, have devoted all their zeal to acquiring honors, will not, even if we bear the sun itself in our hands, apply credence to that doctrine which orders them to live humbly, despising all power and honor, and to be so humble that they can accept injury and not want to pay it back if they should have received it. These are men who bark at the truth in a certain manner with closed eyes. However, those who will be safe, that is, not so immersed in vices as to be incurable, will both believe these things and will accede to them readily. Whatever we say that is open,

⁶ Vergil, *Georgics* 3.244.

plain, and simple, and, what is especially necessary, will seem true and irrefutable to them.

No one favors virtue except the one who can follow it. To follow it, however, is not easy for all. Those can whom poverty and want of possession has exercised and made capacious of virtue. For if virtue is tolerance of evils, they do not receive virtue who have always been in good circumstances, because they have not experienced evils, nor can they endure them through the acquaintance and longing of the goods which alone they know. So it happens that the poor and lowly who are unimpeded believe in God more easily than the rich who are surrounded with many impediments. Rather, indeed, they are chained and shackled in their service to the wish of their mistress, desire, which has them caught in inextricable bonds. Nor can they look toward heaven, because their mind is turned toward earth and fastened on the gound. The way of virtue does not take those bearing great burdens. The path is very narrow over which justice leads men to heaven. One cannot hold this unless he be untrammelled and lightly-clad. Those rich ones, burdened with many huge packs, advance upon the way of death which is very broad, because perdition rules widely. The matters which God charges for justice, and the things which we discuss about virtue and truth under the magisterium of God, are bitter to them; they are poisonous to them. And if they dare to refute these, it is necessary that they admit themselves to be enemies of virtue and justice.

Now I will come to that which is left, so that an end can be made to this work. The task facing us now is the discussion of the judgment of God, because it will be determined, then, when our Lord returns to the earth, how He will render to each one according to his merits, either reward or punishment. And so, as in the fourth book⁷ we spoke about His first coming, we will in this one refer to His second coming which the Jews also confess and hope for, but in vain, since it is neces-

⁷ Ch. 12.

sary that He come to console those whom He had come at first to call together. Those who impiously violated Him in His lowly condition will perceive a Victor in power; and all those things which they read and do not understand they will suffer, God making recompense; for, truly, those defiled by all sins and stained with the sacred blood of Him upon whom they laid wicked hands are destined for eternal punishments. But there will be for us a section separated away from the Jews, in which we will convict them of error and crime.

Chapter 2

Now we must give instruction to those ignorant of the truth. It has been so ordained by the disposition of the Most High God that this unjust world receive its limit when the space of time has run its course, and forthwith all evil will be extinguished. The souls of the just having been called to the blessed life, there will flourish quiet, tranquility, and peace; in short, a 'golden age,' as the poets say, under the reign of God Himself. In the first place, the cause of all the errors of philosophers was this, that they did not comprehend the plan of the world which holds all wisdom. That, in fact, in a proper sense and by interior understanding cannot be comprehended, a thing which they wanted to accomplish of themselves without any teacher. For this reason, they fell into various opinions, often contradictory to themselves, from which they had no way out, and they stuck in the same mire, as the comic writer says.¹ Reason, to be sure, did not respond to their assumptions, although they assumed some true things, indeed, but these could not be affirmed or proved without knowledge of the truth and of heavenly things, which, as I have often said, cannot be in man unless God teaches its perception. Now if a man can understand the divine teach-

¹ Terence, *Phormio* 5.2.15.

ings, he will also be able to do them, for to understand is to follow from a trace, as it were. He cannot do the things which God does because he is clothed with a mortal body; therefore, he cannot even understand what God does. If this were possible, it would be easy for each one to be measured from the immensity of things and of the divine works.

If you wish to contemplate the world with all the things that are in it, you would understand, surely, how much the work of God exceeds human works. Thus, there is as much difference between divine and human works as there must be between the wisdom of God and man. Since God is incorrupt and immortal and, therefore, perfect because He is everlasting, His wisdom also is perfect as He is Himself, nor can anything obstruct it because God Himself is subject to no one. Since man, however, is subject to passion, his wisdom also is subject to error; and, as many things hinder the life of man from being perpetual, so it is necessary that his wisdom be impeded by many things from being perfect in thoroughly grasping the truth. Therefore, there is no human wisdom if it strives of itself toward a notion and knowledge of what is true, since the mind of man is wrapped in a fragile case and enclosed in a shade-like domicile; nor can it wander abroad very freely or perceive the truth quite clearly, the knowledge of which belongs to the divine condition. For to God alone are His works known. Man, therefore, can attain to this, not by thinking or disputing, but by learning and hearing it from Him who alone can know and teach it. For this reason, Marcus Tullius, taking from Plato the sentiment of Socrates who said that the time had come for him to pass from this life, has him say to those before whom he was finishing his case: 'Which way is better to spend life, the immortal gods know, but I do not believe that any man knows.'² Wherefore, it is necessary that all the sects of philosophy be removed from the truth, because they were men who established them;

² Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.41.99; cf. Plato, *Apology* 42 A.

nor can those systems have any prop or foundation which are not supported on the pronouncements of the divine voice.

Chapter 3

Since we are speaking about the errors of the philosophers, the Stoics divide nature into two parts; one which brings about an effect, the other which makes itself tractable so as to be effected. In the former is the power of sensing; in the latter, the matter. And one cannot be without the other. How can the same thing act and be acted upon? If someone should say that the potter is the same as the clay or the clay the same as the potter, would he not clearly seem to be insane? Yet, those have taken hold of two very different things by the one name of nature: God and the world, the Artificer and the work; and they say that one can do nothing without the other, as if God were mixed with the world by nature. Sometimes, they get so confused that they hold God Himself as the mind of the world, and the world as the body of God, as if, indeed, they began to be simultaneously, and that God Himself did not make the world. They themselves acknowledge that this is not so, when they declare that the world was made for the sake of men, and that God can exist without the world, if He wish, since He is a divine and eternal Mind, separated and free from a body.¹ Because they could not understand His power and majesty, they confused Him or mixed Him with the world, that is, His work; whence that line of Vergil: 'The mind infused through the members stirs the whole mass and mixes itself with the great body.'²

Where, then, is that which they say is the same thing, and that it was made by divine providence and is ruled by it? If God made the world, then He existed without it. If He rules it, surely, it is not as the mind rules the body, but as a lord

¹ Cf. Bk. I, ch. 5.

² *Aeneid* 6.726,727.

directs a household, a pilot a ship, a charioteer a chariot. These, however, are not mixed in those things which they rule. And if all these things which we see are members of God, then an insensible God is set up by them, since the members lack sense, and a mortal God, since we see that the members are mortal. I can enumerate how often the lands shaken by sudden movements have gaped open or receded into an abyss; how often cities and islands submerged by water have gone into the depths of the sea; how often swamps have overwhelmed fruitful fields; how often rivers and lakes have dried up; how even mountains have abruptly fallen or been leveled with plains; and how inner fire, lying concealed, has consumed many regions and the foundations of many mountains. This is slight if God does not spare His own members, except that it is also permitted to man to do something to the body of God; seas are filled up, mountains are cut down, and the interior parts of the earth are dug up for extracting wealth.³ What of the fact that plowing cannot be done even without laceration of the divine body? As a result, we are now criminal and impious who violate the members of God.

Does God, then, allow His body to be molested, or does He make Himself weak, or does He allow this to be done by man? Perhaps, though, that divine sense, which was mixed with the world and with all its parts, left just the first layer of earth and merged with its depths, so that it would not feel any pain from the constant tearing! Now, if this is foolish and absurd, they themselves have been as much in want of sense as these notions are. For they did not perceive that the divine spirit is everywhere diffused, and that all things are contained thereby, not, however, in such a way that God Himself, who is incorrupt, should be mingled with heavy and corruptible elements.

That which they took from Plato, then, was more correct, that the world was made by God, and that it is governed by

³ Cf. Sallust, *Catiline* 20.11; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.138-140.

the same God's providence. It was necessary, however, for Plato and those who thought the same way, to teach and explain what was the cause, what was the plan of making such a great work, why He did this, or for whose sake. The same Stoics say that the world was made for the sake of men. I hear this argument. But Epicurus does not know the men themselves, or why, or who made them.⁴ For Lucretius, saying that the world was not established by the gods, spoke thus: 'To say, of course, that it was for the sake of men that they (i.e., the gods) wished to prepare the wonderful nature of the world.'⁵ And then he added: 'That is foolish. For what can be bestowed by immortal and blessed beings for the sake of our enrichment, so that they might be approached to do something for our sakes?'⁶

And rightly. For they brought on no reason why the human race was created or instituted by God. This is our duty, to put forth the claim and the mystery⁷ of the world and of man. Those who had no acquaintance with this could neither touch upon nor see the treasure of truth.

As I just said a little while ago, although they had assumed that which was true, namely, that the world was made by God and made for the sake of men; however, because reason failed them in the consequences of that assumption, they could not defend that which they had assumed. Finally, Plato, so as not to make the work of God weak and ruinous, said that it would last forever.⁸ If it has been made for men, and if it is so made that it is eternal, why, then, are they, for whose sake it was made, not eternal? If they are mortal on whose account it was made, then it, too, is mortal and soluble. For

⁴ Cf. frg. 371.

⁵ Lucretius 5.156,157.

⁶ *Ibid.* 165-167.

⁷ Lactantius uses but one word here. It is *sacramentum* which did not by his time have the consecrated or theological significance it gained later. Cf. A. Souter, *A Glossary of Later Latin s.v. sacramentum*. Still more complete is the treatment given the word in Albert Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Française des Auteurs Chrétiennes* (Paris 1954) pp. 729-731.

⁸ Cf. Cicero, *Prior Academics* 2.37.118.

it is not of more value than they for whom it was made. If reason were properly functioning for him, he would understand that it would perish, because it has been made, and that nothing can remain forever except what cannot be touched.

However, he who denies that it was made for the sake of men has no reason. For if he says that the Maker fashioned these so great works for His own sake, why, then, were we born? Why do we enjoy this very world? What does the fiction of the human race and of other living creatures mean? Why do we intercept the advantages of others? Why, then, do we grow, decline, die? What reason has generation itself? Why the perpetual succession? To be sure, God wished to see and to fashion by His various images, as it were, little figures by which He might delight Himself. Nevertheless, then, if this were so, He would have care for the living creatures, especially man, to whose dominion He made all things subject.

But to those who say that the world always was—I pass by this point, the fact that it itself cannot be without some beginning; whence they cannot extricate themselves—I say this: if the world always was, it can have no plan. For how could a plan be fashioned in that which never took a start? Before anything is done or erected, there is need of a purpose, a plan, so that it can be arranged how it may be done, nor can anything be undertaken without the foresight of a plan. So plan precedes every work. That does not have a plan, therefore, which has not been made. But the world has a plan, for it exists and it is directed. Therefore, it was made. And if it was made, it will be unmade or destroyed. Let them render the account, if they can, either why it was made in the beginning or should afterwards be destroyed. Since Epicurus, or Democritus, was not able to show this, he said that it was begun of its own accord, seeds coming together here and there. And when these were again loosened, separation and dissolution would follow.⁹ Therefore, he corrupted what he had

⁹ Cf. Epicurus, frg. 382.

rightly seen, and completely overturned the whole plan by his ignorance of the plan; and he reduced the world and all things which go on in it to the likeness of a certain very empty dream since no plan subsists in human affairs.

But, since, as we see, a marvelous plan does govern the world and all its parts; since there is order in the heavens and an even course of stars and heavenly lights in their very variety; since the marking of seasons is constant and wondrous; since the varied fecundity of the earth, the evenness of the fields, the foundations and ramparts of the mountains, the green richness of forests, the very bountiful overflow of waters, the timely flooding of rivers, the opulent and rich content of the sea, the various and useful blowing of the winds, and all things else are according to the highest plan, who is so blind as to think that these things were done without cause, in which the wonderful arrangement of a most provident reason gleams forth? If, therefore, anything at all is or is done without reason; if the providence of the Most High God is manifest from the disposition of things, and His virtue from their magnitude, and His power from their governance, they were dull and mad who said there was no providence. I would not condemn them if they said there were no gods on this account, that they might say there was one. Anyone, however, who would not think that they were delirious when they said that there were none is himself delirious.

Chapter 4

We treated providence sufficiently in the first book. If there is providence, as is clear from the wonderfulness of its works, it is necessary also that God created man and the other living creatures by the same providence. Let us see, then, what was the reason of making the human race, since what the Stoics say is accepted, that the world was made for the sake of men.

Now, they err not a little on this very point, that they do not say for the sake of man, but of men. The term 'man,' one, singular, embraces the whole human race. But this is so, in fact, because they do not know that one man was made by God, and they think that men have been generated in all lands and territories as though merely animal cells. Yet, Hermes was not ignorant of the fact that man was made by God and according to the likeness of God.¹ I must go back, though, to the topic. There is nothing, I believe, which is made on account of itself, but anything at all which is made, must be made for some purpose. Who is there either so foolish or so idle that he should set out to make something to no purpose, from which he would hope for no usefulness, no advantage? He who builds a house does not build it that it may be just a house, but that it may be able to be lived in. He who makes a boat, not only that it may appear to be a boat, but that it may be sailed in. Likewise, he who fashions and forms some vessel does it, not so that he may seem to have made it merely, but that the vessel when completed may hold something necessary. Similarly for any other things whatsoever which are made; surely, they are not worked upon for no purpose at all, but for some worthwhile purposes.

The world, therefore, was certainly not made by God for its own sake, for it does not need the heat of the sun or the light of the moon or the blowing of the winds or the water of the rains or the nourishment of the crops, since it is without sense. This cannot be said, either, that God made the world on account of Himself, since He can exist without the world, as He was before, and because God Himself does not use all those things which are in it and which are generated in it.

It is clear, then, that the world was made for the sake of the living creatures in it, since these enjoy those things of which it consists. In order that these may live, that they may exist, all necessities are provided for them at fixed times. Again, that the other animals were made for the sake of man

¹ Hermes Trismegistus (Poemander) c. 1.12.

is clear from this, that they serve man and have been given to his care and use, since, whether they are of the land or of the water, they do not sense the plan and purpose of the world as man does.

An answer must be made at this place to the philosophers, especially to Cicero, who asks: 'Why, since god made all things for our sake, did he put such great power in serpents and vipers? Why did he spread so many destruction-bearing animals over land and sea?'² It is a very large topic for discussion, but we must try to do it briefly in passing. Since man is composed of diverse and opposing notions, body and soul, that is, of heaven and of earth, and since he is tenuous and comprehensible, eternal and temporal, sensible and brute, endowed with light and darkness, reason itself and necessity demand that both goods and evils be set before him; goods which he may use, evils which he may shun and avoid. It is for this that wisdom has been given to man, so that the nature of goods and evils having been learned, he may exercise the power of his reason in seeking the goods and avoiding the evils. Because wisdom was not given to the other animals, they were endowed and fortified with natural protections; but, to man, however, in preference to all these, He gave reason alone, which was exceptional. So He made man bare and unarmed, so that He might fortify and cover him with wisdom. This protection and covering He placed not on the outside, but within; not in his body, but in his heart. Unless there were evils, however, for him to avoid, and for him to distinguish from the good and the useful, wisdom would not be necessary for him. Let Marcus Tullius know, then, either that reason was given to man for this, that he should catch fish for his use and avoid snakes and vipers for his safety; or, that both goods and evils have been set before him for the reason that he had received wisdom, the whole power of which deals in discerning goods and evils.

Great and direct and admirable is the strength and reason

2 *Prior Academics* 2.38.120.

and power of man, on account of whom God made the world itself and all things which are, and to whom He gave so much honor that He placed him in charge of all, because he alone could marvel at the works of God. Very well, therefore, did our Asclepiades, discussing the providence of the Most High God in the book which he wrote to me, say: 'Who would think, and so rightly, then, that Divine Providence had given the place nearest to Himself to him who would be able to understand His arrangement? That, for instance, is the sun. Who sees it thus, so that he may understand, because it is the sun, how much of grace it may bring to the other things established? This is the sky. Who looks at it? This, the earth. Who cultivates it? This is the sea. Who navigates it? This is fire. Who uses it?'³ The Most High God has instituted all things, then, not on account of Himself, since He needs nothing, but on account of man who might use them fitly.

Chapter 5

Let us get back now to the reason why God made man himself. If the philosophers had known this, or if they had defended those things which they had found out, they would not have fallen into the greatest errors. For this is the principle, this is the hinge of things; from the grasp of him who does not hold this, all truth will slip away. It is this, finally, which may happen to them, that reason be not properly established. If this had shone forth upon them, if they had learned of the whole sublime dignity of man, the Academy would never have confused their discussions and upset all philosophy. Therefore, just as God did not make the world for Himself, because He does not need its advantages; but because of man who uses it, so He made man on account of Himself. 'What usefulness is there in man for god that he should make him

³ This is printed as a quotation in the text, but no source has been given for it.

for himself?'¹ asks Epicurus. Surely, it was so that he might understand His works; that he might be able to admire with his senses and declare with his voice the providence of His arrangement, the plan of His accomplishment, and the virtue of His completion of the work. This is the summation of all these acts, that he worships God. For he worships who understands these things; he attends the Maker of all things, his true Father, with due veneration who measures the power of His majesty from the invention, inception, and perfection of his own works.

What argument can be brought forward more plainly that God made the world for man and man for Himself than the fact that man alone of all living creatures has been so formed; that with his eyes directed toward heaven and his face looking at God, his countenance should be like to that of God his Father; and that God should seem to have lifted man from the earth and to have raised him in His right hand to the contemplation of Himself.²

'What, then,' he says, 'does the worship on the part of man confer upon a god who is blessed and in need of nothing? If he had so much regard for man that he made the world on account of him, that he equipped him with wisdom, that he made him master of living things, and that he loved him as a son, why did he make him mortal and frail? Why did he put him whom he loved up against all evils, when man should have been both happy, as though joined and near to god, and everlasting, as he is himself, for the worshipping and contemplation of whom he was made?'³

While we have treated these matters here and there in nearly all the preceding books, however, since the matter now demands a proper handling, where it has been proposed to discuss the happy life, those points must be explained more carefully and more fully so that the disposition of God and

1 Frg. 371; cf. Lucretius 5.165-167.

2 This is the theme of *The Workmanship of God*.

3 Epicurus, frg. 371.

His work and will may be known. Although He could create innumerable souls for His immortal spirits, just as He made the angels for whom immortality exists without any danger and fear of evils, yet He thought up this unspeakable work: how to create an infinite multitude of souls, which He would place at first in frail and weak bodies, bound in the midst of good and evil, so that before those consisting by nature of both parts He might put virtue, lest they follow after immortality in a delicate and soft way, but that they might come upon that unspeakable reward of eternal life with the greatest difficulty and great labors. Then, in order that He might put on them heavy and bothersome members, since they could not exist in the middle of empty space, the weight and heaviness of the body pressing them down, He determined that, first of all, an abode and dwelling place would have to be set up for these souls. So, with ineffable virtue and power, He fashioned the wonderful works of the world. The light elements being suspended on high, and the heavy ones pressed downward, He erected the heavenly bodies and established the earthly ones. It is not necessary now to go into individual details, since we touched upon all of them in the second book. Therefore, He put lights in the sky, the moderation and brightness and motion of which was most fittingly tempered to the use of living beings. To the earth, which He intended for their abode, He gave the fruitfulness of producing and giving forth various crops, so that by the richness of its crops and green grasses it might furnish nourishment according to the nature and use of each kind. Then, when all things which pertained to the condition of the world were completed, He formed man from the earth itself, which He prepared from the beginning as a habitation for him. In other words, He clothed and wrapped his spirit in an earthly body, so that compounded of different and opposing parts, he might lay hold of good and evil. And just as the earth itself is fecund for the producing of crops, so the body of man, which has been taken from the earth, received the source of genera-

ting and the faculty of bringing forth offspring in order that, since that which was made from frail matter could not endure forever, when the course of a temporal life had been spent, it might yield and renew that fragile and weak element which it possessed by a perpetual succession.

Why, then, did He make him mortal and frail when He had made the world for his sake? First, that an infinite force of souls might spring up and fill the whole world with its number; and then, that He might set virtue before man, that is, endurance of evils and labors, through which he might be able to gain the reward of immortality. For, since man consists of two parts, body and soul; one of which is earthly, the other heavenly, two lives have been assigned to man. One is temporal which is assigned to the body; the other is eternal which belongs to the soul. We receive the first by being born; we gain the latter by laboring, lest immortality for man be determined without any difficulty as we just said. That earthly life is as the body and is ended, therefore, but this heavenly one is like the soul and, for this reason, it does not have an end. The first one we receive unknowingly; this second one, with full awareness, for it is given to virtue, not nature, because God wished us to prepare life for ourselves during life. He gave this present life for this reason, that we might lose that true and everlasting life by vices or merit it by virtue. The highest good is not in this corporal life, since, as it has been given to us by divine necessity, so will it be dissolved again by divine necessity. So that which has an end does not have the highest good.⁴ It is in that spiritual life, however, which we ourselves gain of ourselves that the highest good is contained, because it can have neither evil nor an end.

The nature and the plan of the body furnish a proof for this. The other animals turn towards the ground because they are earthly, and they do not get immortality which is of heaven. Man, however, upright, looks toward heaven because immortality has been proposed for him. But it does not come,

⁴ Cf. Orientius, *Commonitorium* 1.43-58.

however, unless it be granted to man by God, for there would be no difference between just and unjust if every man were born immortal. So, immortality is not the sequel of nature, but it is the reward and boon of virtue. Then, too, man does not immediately walk upright as soon as he is born, but on all fours at first, because the condition of the body and of this present life is one we have in common with the dumb animals. Then, after its powers are strengthened, it is straightened up, and the tongue is loosened unto speech, and man ceases to be a dumb beast. This arrangement shows that man is born mortal, but that he later becomes immortal, when he begins to live of God, that is, to follow justice which is contained in the worship of God; when God shall have raised man up to the sight of heaven and of Himself. This takes place at the time when man, purified by the heavenly washing, lays off infancy with all the stain of former life and, having received the increment of divine strength, becomes a full and perfect man.⁵

Therefore, because God has proposed virtue to man, though the soul and body be joined, they are contrary, however, and fight against each other. The goods of the soul are evils to the body, namely, flight from wealth, ban on pleasure, contempt of pain and death. In the same way the goods of the body are evils to the soul, desire and passion, with which both riches and the delights of various pleasures are sought after, and by which the soul is enervated and its life extinguished. It is necessary, then, for the good and wise man to be in all evils, since the conquest of evils is fortitude; whereas, the unjust are in riches, honor, power, which are corporal and earthly goods. They pass an earthly existence, nor can they attain immortality, since they have given themselves to pleasures which are enemies of virtue. So this temporal life ought to be subject to that eternal one, as the body is to the soul.

Whoever, then, prefers the life of the soul must condemn the life of the body, and in no way will he be able to strive

⁵ Cf. 1 Cor. 13.11; Eph. 4.13.

after the highest unless he despises those which are lowest. But he who embraces the life of the body and casts his desires upon earth cannot gain that higher life. He who prefers to live well in eternity will live badly in time and will be afflicted with all grievances and labors as long as he will be on earth, so that he may obtain divine heavenly solace. And he who prefers to live well in time will live badly in eternity. For by the sentence of God, he will be condemned to eternal punishment because he has placed earthly goods before heavenly ones. It is for this reason, therefore, that God desires Himself to be worshiped and honored as a Father by man, so that he may cling to virtue and wisdom which alone brings forth immortality. Since no one else but Himself can give this, because He alone possesses it, He adorns the piety of man, by which he honors God with this reward, that he might be blessed forever and be with God in His presence forever.

Chapter 6

Now let us go over the whole plan with a brief recapitulation. The world was made for this reason, that we should be born. We are born, therefore, that we should know the Maker of the world and our God. We know Him that we may worship Him. We worship Him that we may gain immortality as a reward for our labors, since the worship of God rests on very great labors. Therefore, we are rewarded with immortality that, made like the angels, we may serve the Father and Lord Most High forever and be an everlasting kingdom for God. This is the sum of everything; this the secret of God; this the mystery of the world, from which they are estranged who, following present pleasure, have given themselves to frail, earthly goods, and who have submerged their souls, born for heavenly things in the death-bearing joys of time as though in mire or slime.

Let us seek now, in turn, whether any plan underlies the worship of the false gods. First, whether there are many of them; then, if they are worshiped so much by men that they present them with wealth, victories, honors, and anything else which has no value except for the present. If we have come to exist without a cause; if there is no providence at work in the procreation of men; if we are born by chance, and for ourselves and for the sake of our own pleasure? If we are nothing after death, what can be so superficial, so inane, so empty as human affairs and as the world itself which, although it is constructed of incredible magnitude and with marvelous plan, is yet full of concern for inept things? Why should the blowing of winds stir up clouds? Why does lightning flash, thunder roar, rain fall? Why does the land produce crops, and feed the young of various kinds? Why, finally, does the whole nature of things labor lest any of those things on which the life of man is sustained be lacking, if it is idle, if we come to nothing, if nothing in us is of greater worth to God? But if it is wrong to say this, and if it should not be thought possible that what you see rests on a very great plan not constructed on account of some great purpose, what can be the reason in these errors of depraved religions and in this persuasion of the philosophers that they think souls perish? Surely, there is none. What have they to say about why the gods so diligently supply to men the things which are for the seasons? Or, is it that we may give them grain and pure wine and the odor of incense and the blood of cattle? These things cannot be pleasing to the immortals because they are perishable; nor can they be of use to those free of bodies because these things were given for bodily use; furthermore, they could provide them for themselves, if they wished.

Therefore, whether souls perish, or whether they remain forever, what purpose has the worship of the gods, or by whom was the world arranged? Why, or when, or until what time, to what extent, or on account of what were men created? Why are they born; why do they die, succeed, and renew the race?

What do the gods attain from the cults of those who after death are going to be nothing? What do they grant; what do they promise; what do they threaten worthy of either men or gods? Or if souls do remain after death, what do they do about them, or what are they going to do? What need have they of the treasure of souls? From what source do they themselves arise? How or wherefore or whence are they many? So, it happens that, if you wander astray from that principal teaching or summary of things which we have at the beginning of this chapter, all reason is done away with and all things are resolved to nothing.

Chapter 7

Because the philosophers did not comprehend this digest, they could not comprehend the truth, although those things on which the summary or digest itself rests, they both saw and explained. But different ones of them brought out all those points and in different ways, not connecting the causes of things, nor their consequences nor reasons, so that they might put together and complete that whole summary which contains all the parts. It is easy to show that almost all the truth has been divided by the philosophers and sects. We do not, thus, overturn philosophy as the Academicians are wont to, to whom it has been proposed to give an answer to all tenets (which is, rather, to satirize and make sport), but we show that there was no sect so far wrong or no one of the philosophers so inane who did not see something of the truth.

While they rage with the desire of contradicting, and while they even defend their false doctrines, they also subvert the truths of others, and not only has the truth which they pretended that they were seeking slipped away from them, but they themselves have most surely lost it through their own evil. But if someone had arisen who would collect the truth scattered and dispersed among the individual philosophers

and sects and reduce it into one body, that one, certainly, would not disagree with us. But no one can do this unless he be well trained and have a knowledge of the truth. Neither can he do anything but reject the false and select and approve of what is true. If he did this even by chance, he would be most certainly philosophizing; and, although he could not defend his tenets by divine testimonies, the truth itself would enlighten him by its own light.

Therefore, it is an unbelievable error on the part of those who, when they have approved of some sect and given themselves over to it, condemn the others as though false and inane and arm themselves to do battle, not knowing either what they ought to defend or what to refute. And they make attacks here and there without selection and disagree with everything which anyone brings forward. On account of these most stubborn contentions of theirs, no philosophy has arisen which came very close to the truth, but the whole truth was comprehended by them in piecemeal fashion.

Plato said that the world was made by God. The prophets said the same thing, and the same thing is clear from the Sibylline verses. They are mistaken, therefore, who said either that all things were born of their own accord, or from minute globules, because so great is the matter (namely, the universe, all creation), so equipped and so mighty that it could not have been disposed and arranged without some exceedingly wise author; and the very plan by which all things are perceived to exist and to be ruled acknowledges an Artificer of most ingenious mind.

The Stoics say that the world and all things which are in it were made for man. The Sacred Writings teach us the same thing.¹ Therefore, Democritus was wrong who thought that they were effused from the earth in the manner of little worms, with no author and no plan. Why man was formed, then, is a matter of divine mystery, and since he was not able to know that, he reduced human life to nothing.

¹ Cf. Orientius, *loc. cit.* 1.59-64.

Aristotle held that men were born to acquire virtue. We are warned and taught the same lesson by the prophets. Aristippus, then, was false who subjected man, as if he were a beast, to pleasure, that is, to evil.

Pherecydes² and Plato taught that souls were immortal. This is a proper doctrine in our religion. Dicaearchus,³ then, erred with Democritus who argued that it perished with the body.

Zeno, the Stoic, taught that there was a hell, and that the abodes of the just were separated from the wicked, and that the former inhabited quiet and delightful regions, while the latter paid their penalty in dark places and horrible caverns of mud. The prophets made the same thing clear to us. Therefore, Epicurus was in error who thought that this was a figment of the poet's imagination, and took those punishments of hell to be those which are borne in this life.⁴

So we see that the philosophers touched upon all truth and upon every secret of divine religion, but they could not defend that which they had found in the face of those others who refuted it, because plan and purpose did not squarely fit the individual matters. And they were not able to reduce to a summation those things which they had felt as true, as we did above (at the beginning of chapter 6).

Chapter 8

The one greatest good, then, is immortality, for the attainment of which we have been made from the beginning and for which we were born. We tend toward this. Human nature looks to this. Virtue carries us forward to it. Since we have

2 A celebrated philosopher from Syros. He was an instructor of Pythagoras. Cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.16.38; *On Divination* 1.50.112. He is reputed, too (according to Pliny, *Natural History* 7.56.57) to be the inventor of prose.

3 A pupil of Aristotle; famous also as a geographer; founder of Dicaearchia, now Puteoli. Cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 3.5.9; Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.10.31; *Duties* 2.5.

4 Cf. Lucretius 3.978,979.

grasped this good, there remains that we speak also about immortality itself. Although the arguments of Plato bring much to the matter at hand, however, they have little strength for proving and fulfilling the truth, since he had not finished the plan of the whole great mystery, nor gathered it together; neither had he comprehended the greatest good. For although he perceived the truth about the immortality of the soul, he did not, however, so consider it as though the highest good. We, however, are able to pick out the truth by surer signs; we who gather it, not from fluctuating suspicion, but who know it from divine tradition.

Plato argued thus: 'Whatever perceives itself through itself and is always moved by itself is immortal; that which has no beginning of motion, and which will have no end, since it cannot be separated from itself.'¹ This argument would give eternity even to dumb animals, unless he had distinguished men from them by the added requirement of wisdom. So, to escape this danger of a common application, there followed: 'It is not possible for the human soul to be other than immortal whose marvelous adroitness in coming upon facts, and quickness of thinking, and ease in perceiving and learning, and memory of past things, and foresight for the future, and knowledge of the innumerable arts and skills, which the other animals lack appears divine and heavenly; since, also, the origin of the mind which embraces and holds such great things is not discovered on earth, inasmuch as it has nothing mixed from an earthly mass. However, that which is ponderous and dissolvable in man must be resolved into the earth, but that part which is tenuous and subtle, that, in truth, is individual, and must be freed from the dwelling place of the body as from a prison, and it must soar to heaven according to its nature.'²

These teachings of Plato have been briefly put together, and they are explained in his own works at great length. Pythag-

¹ *Phaedrus* 245 C ff.; cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.23.53; *The Republic* 6.25.27.

² Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.27.66.

oras was of the same opinion before him and his teacher Pherecydes, too, who Cicero says was the first to discuss the eternity of souls.³ Though all these excelled in eloquence, still, in this contention those who opposed them held no less of influence: Dicaearchus, at first; then, Democritus; finally, Epicurus. To such a degree was this the case that the very matter on which they were disputing was called into doubt. At last, Tullius, when he had expressed the opinions of all these on immortality and death, declared that he did not know what was true.

'Which is true of these opinions,' he said, 'some god might see.'⁴ Again, someplace he said: 'Since each of these opinions had most learned authors, it cannot be divined which is certain.'⁵ But we have no need of divination. Divinity Itself has revealed the truth to us.

Chapter 9

And so by other proofs, which neither Plato nor anyone else came upon, the eternity of souls can be proved and understood. We will gather these together briefly, because the work is hurrying on to a declaring of the great judgment of God, which will be celebrated on earth as the end of time approaches. Before all things, since God cannot be seen by man (lest anyone think, however, from this very fact that there is not a God because He is not seen with mortal eyes), among the other miracles of His making, He caused many also the power of which at least is apparent, though their substance is not seen, such as, the voice, odor, winds. He worked these miracles so that from the proof and example of these things we might discern God also; for, although He does not come

³ *Ibid.* 1.16.38.

⁴ *Ibid.* 1.11.23.

⁵ From an uncertain work, frg. 11.

under the gaze of our eyes, still we learn of His power and effects and works.

What is clearer than the voice, or stronger than wind, or more compelling than odor? Although these are borne through the air and come to our senses and impel them by their power, still they are not discerned by the sight of the eyes, but they are felt by other parts of the body. Similarly, God is not to be comprehended by us by sight or by any other fragile sense, but He is to be intued with the eyes of the mind when we behold His wonderful and admirable works. I would say that those who have said there was no God were not only not philosophers, but not even men. For very similar to the beasts, they seem to have consisted of body alone, discerning nothing with their minds and referring all things to a sense of the body, for they thought that there was nothing save that which was beheld by the eyes

And because they saw either that adversity befell the good or that prosperity was the lot of the evil, they believed that all things were done fortuitously and that the world was set up by nature, not by providence. From this point on they fell to mad ravings which necessarily followed such an opinion. But if God is without a body and invisible and eternal, on this account, it is not credible that the soul is dead because it is not seen after it has departed from the body, since it is certain that there exists something thinking and alive which does not come under the sight of the eyes.

Yet, it is difficult to comprehend with the mind how it is possible for the soul to retain knowledge (*sensum*) without those parts of the body in which the function of sensing resides. What about God? It is not easy, is it, to understand how He lives without a body? But if they believe there are gods (and if there are, surely, they are souls without bodies), it is necessary for human souls to subsist in the same way, since from reason itself and prudence a certain likeness is understood to be in man and God. Finally, that proof which Marcus Tullius saw is strong enough. From it the eternity of the soul can be

learned, because 'there is no other animal which has some knowledge of god, and religion is almost the only thing which distinguishes man from the beasts.'¹ Since this occurs in man alone, surely, it bears witness that we effect that, we desire that, we cherish that which is familiar to us, that which is going to be closest. Or, when someone has considered the nature of the other animals which the providence of the Most High God has made abject with lowered bodies, prostrate upon the ground, so that it might be able to be understood from this that heaven has no purpose for them, can he not understand that man alone of all is a celestial and god-like animal; that his body has been lifted from the earth; that his face is raised on high; that his upright stature seeks its origin; and that he is one who, despising, so to speak, the lowliness of the earth, strains toward heaven because he realizes that the highest good is to be sought by him on high; that he is one who is mindful of his condition by which God made him noble, by which he looks to his Maker?² Trismegistus very rightly named this 'looking to' a *God-gazing*.³ There is nothing like this in the dumb animals. Since wisdom, moreover, which is given to man alone, is nothing other than a knowledge of God, it is clear that the soul does not die and is not dissolved, but remains forever, because it seeks and loves God who is everlasting, being compelled by its very nature which realizes either whence it has arisen or where it will return.

Besides, it is no slight proof of immortality that man alone uses the heavenly element.⁴ For although nature consists of these two elements, fire and water, which are repugnant and inimical to each other, the one of which is ascribed to heaven and the other to earth, the other animals, because they are earthly and mortal, use the earthly and heavy element. Man

¹ Cicero, *Laws* 1.8.24.

² Again, this is the theme of Lactantius' *The Workmanship of God*.

³ The text-editor gives no source for this reference. The Greek is *Theōptian*.

⁴ A return to this primitive or naive scientific basis seems like more of an anti-climax than a clinching argument.

alone makes use of fire, which is a light, sublime, heavenly element. Those things, in truth, which are weighty press toward death, and those which are light lift up toward life, because life is in the heights, death in the depths. And as there cannot be light without fire, so there is no life without light. Fire, therefore, is the element of light and life. From this it is clear that man who uses it has been allotted an immortal condition, because that which causes life is familiar to him.

Virtue, also given to man alone, is a great proof that souls are immortal. There will not be this virtue according to nature if the soul is extinguished. It does harm to this present life. For that earthly life, which we lead in common with the brutes, both seeks after pleasure whose various fruits and charms delight it, and shuns pain whose harshness hurts the nature of living things in their keen senses and strives to bring them to death which dissolves life. If virtue keeps man from those goods which are naturally sought and drives him to undergo those which are naturally avoided, then, virtue is an evil and inimical to nature; and he must be judged a fool who follows it, since he harms himself by fleeing present goods and by, likewise, seeking after evils without hope of more ample reward. For when it should be permitted to us to enjoy the most delightful pleasures, would we not seem lacking in sense if we preferred to live in humility, need, contempt, and ignominy; or not even to live, but to be tortured with pain and to die, from which evils we would gain nothing more than that whereby the foregone pleasure might be repaid? If, on the other hand, virtue is not an evil, and acts nobly because it despises base and vicious pleasures, and strongly because it fears neither pain nor death to observe its duty, then, it must be that some greater good is gained than are those which it spurns. But, indeed, when death has been accepted, what further good can be hoped for but eternity?

Chapter 10

Let us pass on now, in turn, to those things which are repugnant to virtue, so that the immortality of the soul may be gathered also from these. All vices are temporal, for they are put in motion for the present time. The impetus of anger is quieted when revenge has been gained. The delight of passion is the end of the body. Either the satiety of those things which it seeks, or the excitements of the other emotions, do away with cupidity. After ambition has gained the honors which it wished, it becomes weak and dies out. Likewise, the other vices are not able to hold and endure, but they are finished by the very fruition which they seek. Therefore, they recede and go away. Virtue, however, is perpetual without any interruption, nor can it depart from him who has once seized it. For if it should have an interval, if at some time we can be without it, then straightway will those vices return which always fight against virtue. It has not, then, been really laid hold of if it leaves, if it departs at any time. In fact, when it has established a stable dwelling place for itself, it is necessary for it to take part in every action, and it is not able to repel vices and put them to flight unless it has fortified the heart which it inhabits by constant settlement. This very lastingness of virtue indicates that the human soul, if it has seized virtue, endures because virtue itself is perpetual and the human soul alone holds virtue.

Because, then, the vices are contrary to virtue, it is necessary that the whole plan and reason be diverse and contrary. Since vices are commotions and disturbances of the soul, virtue is, on the other hand, the quietude and tranquility of the soul; since vices are temporary and brief, virtue is perpetual and constant and always equal to itself; since the fruits of vices, that is, pleasures, are temporal and brief, just as vices themselves are, the fruit and reward of virtue, then, is everlasting; and whereas the advantage of vices rests in the present, that of

virtue is settled in the future. So it happens that in this life there is no reward of virtue because virtue is still itself. And just as when vices are finished in their act, their pleasure and rewards follow; so when virtue is ended, its reward follows. But virtue is never finished, except at death, because it is in the acceptance of death even that its greatest office lies. Therefore, the reward of virtue is after death.

Lastly, in the *Tusculans*, Cicero came to realize, although hesitatingly, however, that the highest good did not befall man except after death. 'For the trusting soul,' he says, 'if it so bears the affairs of life, there will be a passage to death in which we know that there is either the highest good, or, at any rate, no evil.'¹

Death, then, does not put an end to man, but it admits him to the reward of virtue. But he who has contaminated himself with vices and crimes, as the same writer tells us,² and has served pleasure, will be condemned to pay eternal penalty which the Sacred Writings name a second death,³ and this is both everlasting and full of most dire tortures. And just as two lives have been proposed to man, one of which is of the soul, the other of the body, so have two deaths been set before him; one pertaining to the body, through which all must pass according to nature, and the other pertaining to the soul which is acquired by crime, avoided by virtue. As this life is temporal and has fixed limits because it is of the body, so, also, death is equally temporal and has a fixed end since it happens to the body.

Chapter 11

The time being fulfilled, then, which God has set for death, death itself will be terminated. And because temporal death follows temporal life, it is a consequence that souls will rise

¹ Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.46.110.

² *Ibid.* 1.30.72; cf. also *The Republic* 6.25.29.

³ Cf. Apoc. 20.6; 20.14; 21.8.

again to never-ending life, since temporal death has come to an end. Again, as the life of the soul is everlasting, in which it receives the divine and unspeakable fruits of its immortality, so its death must be also perpetual in which it pays the everlasting punishment and infinite torments due to its sins. So the matter rests on this condition: that those who are blessed in this corporal and earthly life are going to be always miserable, because they have already secured possession of the goods which they preferred (which happens to those who adore the false gods and neglect God); and then those who following justice will have been wretched, and despised, and poor in this life, and often harassed by disgraces and injuries on account of that very justice, since virtue cannot be held in any other way, are going to be blessed forever. And, as they have now endured evils, they will then enjoy goods.¹ This, certainly, happens to those who, despising earthly gods and perishable goods, follow the sublime religion of God whose goods are everlasting, just as is He Himself who bestows them.

Do not the works of the body and soul, therefore, indicate that the soul has no part with death? Because the body is perishable and mortal, whatever works it performs are equally frail. Tullius said: 'There is nothing which has been worked by human hands which is not at some time reduced to destruction, either by the injury of men or by the very destroyer of all things, old age.'² We see, though, that the works of the soul are eternal. For whoever have been zealous in their contempt of present things and have left memorials of their genius and great deeds, these have, surely, sought the indelible name of their mind and virtue. If, then, the works of the body are mortal from the fact that it is itself mortal, it follows that the soul is clearly immortal from this, because we see that its works are not mortal.

In the same manner, the desires of the body and soul show that one is mortal, the other everlasting. For the body desires

¹ Cf. the Beatitudes, Matt. 5.

² Cicero, *Pro Marcello* 4.11.

nothing except what is temporal, that is, food, drink, covering, rest, desire; and, still, it is not possible to wish for or to attain these things themselves without the consent and the support of the soul. The soul, however, desires many things of itself which do not redound to the office or the profit of the body, and they are not perishable, but eternal, for example, the reputation of virtue, or the memory of a name. The soul also desires, and even against the body, the worship of God which consists in abstinence from desires and passions, patience in pain, contempt of death. Whence it can be believed that the soul does not die, but is dissociated from the body, because the body without the soul can do nothing; whereas, the soul has much and great power without the body. What of the fact that those things which are visible to the eyes and tangible to the hand, because they can suffer external force, are not able to be eternal; while those things which do not come into the realm of sight or touch, but through their power and reason and effects, are apparent only, are eternal, since they suffer no external violence? The body, therefore, if it is mortal from this reason, that it is subject to sight and touch equally; then, the soul is immortal for this reason, that it can neither be touched nor seen.

Chapter 12

Now let us refute the arguments of those who set forth contrary opinions. Lucretius worked them into his third book. 'Since the soul is born with the body,' he said, 'it needs must perish with the body.'¹ But the plan of each is not the same; for the body is solid and comprehensible to eye and hand, while the soul is subtle, escaping both touch and sight. The body is made of earth and is made solid; the soul has nothing of the concrete in it, nothing of earthly weight, as Plato held.²

¹ Lucretius 3.417.

² Cf. *Phaedo* 80 D; *Phaedrus* 245 C ff.; also Cicero's discussion of the same matter in *Tusculans* 1.23.53; *The Republic* 6.25.27.

Nor could it have such great ability, such great power, such great swiftness unless it drew its origin from heaven. The body, because it is made of a weighty and corruptible element and because it is tangible and visible, is corrupted and dies; neither can it repel force since it comes under the power of sight and touch. The soul, however, since it avoids all contact by its subtleness, can be dissolved by no blow. Therefore, although they are born joined and associated with one another; and although the one, that formed from an earthly mass, is, as it were, the vessel of the other, which is drawn from heavenly subtleness; and when some force has severed them both (and this severing is called death), each returns to its own nature, that which was of the earth is resolved into earth; that which was of heavenly breath remains and flourishes forever, since the divine breath or spirit is everlasting. In fact, even the same Lucretius, forgetting what he was upholding and what doctrine he was defending, put down these verses: 'Likewise it goes back again into the earth, that which came from the earth before; but that which was sent from heavenly regions, the gleaming temples of heaven again receive it back.'³

This was not for him to say who was teaching that souls perished with bodies, but he was overcome by truth, and the true reason stole upon him unawares. Besides, that very point which he makes, namely, that the soul is dissolved, that is, that it dies together with the body, since they are born at the same time, is false, and it can be changed into the contrary. For the body does not disintegrate at once, but at the departure of the soul, it remains whole for many days; and generally, when it has been embalmed, it lasts for a very long time. If they perished at the same time, as they are born at the same time, the soul would not depart suddenly and leave the body; but, at the one instant of time, they would both be equally dissipated. Just so quickly would the body, too, melt away and perish (the breath still remaining in it), as the soul quickly departs; or, rather, in truth, with the body dis-

³ Lucretius 2.999-1001.

solved, the soul would disappear, just as spilled liquid vanishes when a vase has been broken. For if the earthly and perishable body does not immediately disintegrate and disappear into the earth from which it has origin, then, the soul which is not perishable remains forever, since its origin is eternal.⁴

'Because the mind increases in children and grows strong in young men and weakens in old, it is clear that it is mortal,'⁵ he says. In the first place, the mind and the soul are not the same. One is that by which we live, and the other is that by which we think. The mind of a sleeping man sleeps, not his soul; and in those who are mad, the mind is gone, but the soul remains. For this reason the mad are not called lifeless, but demented.⁶ The mind, therefore, that is, the intelligence is either increased or diminished according to age. But the soul is always in its condition, and from the time that it receives the faculty of inspiring, it remains the same to the end, until, let out from the cloister of the body, it flies back to its own abode. Then, there is the fact that the soul, although it has been inspired by God, yet, since it is enclosed in the darkened domicile of earthly flesh, does not have knowledge which is of divinity. It hears, therefore, and learns all things, and by learning and hearing takes in wisdom. And old age does not lessen wisdom, but it increases it if, however, the early age has been passed in virtue. Even if very great old age should overcome the members, it is not a vice of the soul, but a weakness of the body, if sight has gone, if the tongue becomes inactive, if ears grow deaf.⁷ 'But memory fails.'⁸ Why is it strange if the mind is overwhelmed by the ruin of its failing

4 Cf. *ibid.* 3.434-450.

5 *Ibid.* 4.45, 446.

6 Ordinarily, the first word is used of frightened people in the sense of 'breathless,' but here Lactantius is putting his fondness for etymologies to play, having the word for 'soul' (*anima*) as the root of the one (*exanimis*), the word that is used for the scared, but not the mad, who still have souls, and he uses the word for 'mind' (*mens*) as the root of that word which describes the mad (*dementes*), i.e., those out of their mind.

7 Cf. Cicero, *On Old Age* 8.26; Lucretius 3.451, 452.

8 Lucretius 3.453; cf. also Cicero, *On Old Age* 7.21.

house and forgets past events, since in no other way will it attain divine things than by escaping from the prison in which it is restrained?

'But, in truth,' he says, 'the same mind is revolted by pain and grief and it becomes mad with drunkenness, whence it is clear that it is perishable and mortal.'⁹ Therefore, virtue is necessary, and so is wisdom, so that grief which is effected by suffering and by beholding indignities may be repelled by fortitude; and also that the pleasure, not only of drink, but of other things also, may be overcome by abstinence. For if the soul lacks virtue, if devoted to pleasures it grows soft, it will become punishable by death, because virtue is, as we have explained, the fabricator of immortality and the delight of death. Death, however, as I have indicated, does not completely bring to an end and destroy, but it afflicts with eternal punishments. The soul is not able to perish straightway, because it has taken origin from the breath of God which is eternal.

'The soul also feels the sickness of the body, and suffers forgetfulness of itself, and as it becomes sick, so it is also often healed,' says Lucretius.¹⁰ This is the reason, therefore, why virtue should be especially worked after, lest by any pain of the body, the mind, not the soul, be broken and suffer forgetfulness of itself. Because this exists in a certain region of the body¹¹ when some force of sickness has vitiated this part, it is moved from its place and, with its abode as though shaken, it wanders out, to return, certainly, when health and sanity have refashioned its dwelling place. For, since the soul is joined with the body, if it lacks virtue, contact with it weakens and sickness from the association of weakness redounds to the mind. But when it is dissociated from the body, it will be strong of itself, nor will it be tried by any condition of weakness because it has cast off its fragile garment.

⁹ Lucretius 3.459-461.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 3.472.

¹¹ Cf. Lucretius 3.486-522; 610-620.

'Just as an eye dug out and separated from a body is able to see nothing, so the separated soul feels nothing, since it is itself part of the body.'¹² This is a false and unlikely statement. The soul is not part of the body, but it is in the body. Just as that which is contained in a vessel is not part of the vessel, and as those things which are in the house are not said to be parts of the house, so neither is the soul part of the body, since the body is the vessel or the receptacle of the soul.

But that argument is much more inane which says that the soul seems to be mortal because it is not very quickly dismissed from the body, but it will disentangle itself from all the members of the body little by little, beginning from the bottom of the feet.¹³ Just as though it would be eternal if it should burst forth in one single moment, which happens in the case of those who die by the sword. Those, however, who die from sickness breathe forth their spirit gradually, over a long time, so that the soul 'is blown forth' as the limbs stiffen and become cold. Since this material of the blood is contained just as oil in a lamp, it is necessary for that material to be consumed by the heat of fevers and the extremities of the members to stiffen with cold, because the poorer veins are directed to the extremities of the body, and the extreme and slenderer streams dry up when the source-vein fails. It must not be thought, however, that, because the sense of the body fails, the sense of the soul is extinguished and dies. For it is not the soul which becomes brutish when the body fails, but the body becomes brutish when the soul departs, because it draws all sense with it.

When the soul here and now bestows sense on the body and brings it about that it lives, it is not possible that it should itself not be living and sensing of itself, since it itself is sense and life. Listen to this Lucretianism: 'But if our mind were immortal, it would not complain so at being dissolved in death, but it would rejoice rather to go out and leave its

¹² *Ibid.* 3.548,549.

¹³ Cf. *ibid.* 3.526-547.

garment (of the body) behind, as a snake.¹⁴ Indeed, I have never seen anyone who complained at being dissolved in death, but perhaps that one had heard and seen some Epicurean philosophizing, even while he was dying, and discoursing on his dissolution even with his last breath. How can it be known whether one feels that he is being dissolved or liberated from the body, since the tongue becomes mute at the end? For while he can feel and speak, he is not yet dissolved; when he has been dissolved, he can no longer feel nor speak. Thus, to complain about the dissolution he is not yet able, or he is no longer able. 'But before he is dissolved, he knows that he will be dissolved.' What of the fact that we see most of those who die, not complaining that they are being dissolved, as he says, but testifying that they are going out, departing, advancing, and they signify this either by gesture, or if they are still able, they declare it with their voice? Whence it is clear that, not a dissolution takes place, but a separation, which shows that the soul endures.

The other arguments of Epicurean teaching are repugnant to Pythagoras discoursing on how souls migrate from bodies worn out with age and death and get into new ones and recently born bodies; and how the same souls are ever being reborn now in man, now in cattle, now in beast, and now in bird; and that in this way they are immortal, because they often change their abodes of various and dissimilar bodies. This notion of a crazy man, since it was ridiculous and more worthy of the mime than the school, ought not even be refuted seriously. One who does so seems to fear that someone might believe that. Therefore, those arguments which were put forward as false against false ones ought to be passed over by us. It is enough to have refuted those which were made against the truth.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 3.612-614.

Chapter 13

I have made clear, as I believe, that the soul is not soluble. It remains to cite witnesses on whose authority the arguments may be confirmed. Still, I will not now call the prophets to witness, for the whole point of their prophecies and foretellings rests in this alone, that they may show that man was created for the worship of God and for receiving immortality from Him. Rather, I will summon those witnesses who do not accept the necessity of believing the truth.

Hermes, describing the nature of man, in order to show how he was made by God stated this: 'And this same thing, consisting of both natures, the immortal and the mortal, he made the one nature of man; making the same one somehow immortal, somehow mortal; and bearing this one situated in the midst of the divine and immortal nature and the changeable mortal one, so that seeing all things he may marvel at them.'¹ But perhaps someone may reckon this one in the number of philosophers (although carried back among the gods he is honored by the Egyptians with the name of Mercury), and not attribute any more honor to him than to Plato or Pythagoras. Let us seek for greater testimony, therefore.

A certain Polites² consulted the Apollo of the Milesians about whether the soul remains after death or is dissolved, and the response came in these verses: 'The soul, then, as far as it exercises power over the body by its connection, knowing all deadly things by the experience of its mortality, feels pain, whenever it finds itself separated from the mortal element; when the body dies, it is forthwith borne to the air above; being ever ageless, it is altogether apart. The divine foreknowledge of the First-born established this.'³

1 Hermes Trismegistus, p. 45 b. (Patricius); cf. Pseudo-Apuleius *Asclepius* C. 31 and c. 8; cf. also Sedulius (Montefalconius, *Paeleographi Graeci*, p. 246).

2 A son of Priam. Cf. Vergil, *Aeneid* 2.526; 5.564.

3 Cf. G. Wolffius, *Porphyrii de philosophia ex oraculis haurienda librorum reliquiae* p. 177; cf. also Sedulius, as given above, n. 1.

What else? Do not the Sibylline verses show that this is so when they declare that at some time there will take place a judgment of the living and the dead by God? We will give examples of these a little later.

The opinion of Democritus and Epicurus and Dicaearchus about the dissolution of the soul is false then. These, certainly, would not dare discuss the end of souls in the presence of some magician who might know how to call souls from the world below with certain songs or incantations. He would have them come forth and present themselves to human eyes to be seen, and he would have them speak and predict the future. So if those men should dare to advance their opinion on dissolution, they would be conquered by the thing itself and present proof. But, because they did see through to the planning and work of the soul, which is so subtle that it escapes the survey of the human mind, they said that it perished.

What of Aristoxenus who denied that there is any soul at all, even while it lives in the body?⁴ Just as in lyres a pleasing sound and melody is effected by a straining of the strings which musicians call harmony, so in bodies the power of sensing comes to be from the union of the inward parts and the strength of the members. Nothing can be more foolish than this. Truly, that one had unimpaired eyes, but a blind heart, with which he did not 'see' that he was living and had a mind whereby he had thought that out. But this generally happens to philosophers, that they think whatever does not appear to the eyes does not exist at all, although the sight of the mind ought to be much clearer than that of the body for perceiving those things whose power and reason or plan are felt rather than seen.

Chapter 14

Since we have spoken about the immortality of the soul,

⁴ Cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.10.19; 22.51.

it follows that we should show how far and when it is granted to man, so that in this also they may perceive the errors of their folly and wickedness who hold that the gods are mortals made by the decrees and wish of mortals, either because they had come upon arts, or because they had taught the use of certain fruits, or because they had discovered things useful for the life of men, or because they had destroyed wild and dangerous beasts. How far removed from immortality these meritorious deeds are I have showed in the former books and I will show now, so that it may be clear, that only justice brings forth eternal life for man, and that it is God alone who bestows the reward of eternal life.

Those who are said to have become immortal by their own merits, although there was neither justice nor any true virtue in them, did not seek immortality for themselves, but death, by their sins and desires; nor did they merit heavenly reward but infernal punishments which will last together with all those who have worshiped them. I will show that the time of this judgment is approaching; that both a worthy reward be paid to the just, and meet punishment exacted from the wicked. Plato, and many others of the philosophers, although they were ignorant of the origin of things and of that supreme time when the world was made, said that many thousands of ages had gone by from which this most beautiful ornamentation of the world has come to be. They were following the Chaldaeans perhaps who, as Cicero relates in his first book *On Divination*, madly claim that they have four hundred seventy thousand years comprehended in records and monuments.¹ Because they thought they could not be refuted in this, they believed they were free to lie. We, however, whom the Sacred Writings instruct unto a knowledge of the truth, know the beginning and the end of the world. Now, at the end of this work, we will discuss the latter, since we treated the beginning of the world in the second book. Let the philosophers, therefore, who enumerate thousands of years from the beginning

¹ Cf. Cicero, *On Divination* 1.19.36.

of the world, know that the six thousandth year has not yet been concluded. When this number has been completed, it is necessary that the consummation take place and the condition of human affairs be changed for the better.² First, we must make known the proof of this, in which the reason may shine clearly forth.

God completed the world and this admirable work of the nature of things in the space of six days, as the story is contained in the secrets of Sacred Scripture, and the seventh day, on which He rested from His labors, He sanctified. This, however, is the Sabbath Day, which in Hebrew took its name from the number, whence the sevenfold number is legitimate and full.³ For there are the seven days through the revolutions of which, in turn, the cycles of the years are completed; and there are seven stars which do not fall; and seven constellations which are called wandering whose disparate courses and unequal movements are believed to effect the changes of things and varieties of seasons. Therefore, since all the works of God were completed in six days, it is necessary that the world remain in this state for six ages, that is, for six thousand years. The great day of God is terminated by the circle of a thousand years, as the prophet indicates who says: 'In thine eyes, O Lord, a thousand years are as one day.'⁴ And as God labored six days in building such great works, so His religion and the truth must labor during these six thousand years, while malice prevails and dominates. And again, since He rested on the seventh day from His completed labors and blessed that day, so it is necessary that, at the end of the six thousandth year, all evil be abolished from the earth, and that justice reign for a thousand years, and that there be tranquility and rest from the labors which the world is now enduring for so long.

To what extent this may come about I will explain by its

² It is unnecessary to comment on Lactantius' erroneous notions on this point. The beliefs, however, were prevalent in his age.

³ Cf. Irenaeus, *Against All Heresies* 5.28.3; 33.2. Cf. also Aulus Gellius 3.10.

⁴ Cf. Ps. 89 (90).4.

own order. Often we have said that lesser and slight things are figures and foreshowings of great things, so that this day of ours, which is marked by the rising and the setting of the sun, bears the likeness of the great day which the passage of a thousand years determines. In the same manner also, the figure of the earthly man anticipates that fiction of the heavenly man which is to follow. For just as God made man himself last on the sixth day, after He had completed all the things which He fashioned for man's use and, then, led him into this world as into a carefully prepared house, so now on this great sixth day, a true man is made by the word of God, that is, a holy people is fashioned unto justice by doctrine and the precepts of God. And just as then, he was made mortal and imperfect from the earth, so that he might live a thousand years in this world; so now, a perfect man is made from this earthly age, so that having been vivified by God he might exercise mastery in this same world for a thousand years. How this consummation is going to take place and what sort of end impends for human affairs, one will find out if he examines the Sacred Scriptures.

The voices of secular prophets agreeing with heavenly ones announce the end and setting of things after a short time, describing the extreme old age, as it were, of a tired and tottering world.⁵ The things which both prophets and seers say are going to happen before the final conclusion comes upon us, I will add here, having gathered them from all sources and put them together.

Chapter 15

In the secrets of the Sacred Scriptures, we find that a leader of the Hebrews crossed over into Egypt with all his household and kinsmen because a lack of grain supply was pressing him on. When his posterity, having stayed too long in Egypt, had

⁵ Cf. Lucretius 2.1144 ff.

increased unto a mighty people, and since they were being oppressed by the heavy and intolerable yoke of servitude, God struck Egypt with an incurable plague and set His people free by leading them across the middle of the sea, where they could walk dryshod because He separated the waves and moved them to either side. The king of the Egyptians, trying to follow the escaping Hebrews, was cut off with all his forces as the sea returned to its normal state. This deed, so clear and so wonderful, though it showed the actual and present power of God to men, was, however, a pre-signification and figure of a greater thing which the same God is going to do at the final consummation of time. For He will free His people from the heavy servitude of the world. But because, then, there was one people of God, and that people dwelt within one nation, Egypt alone was struck. Now, however, since the people of God have been congregated from all tongues and live among all nations and are being oppressed by all these masters, it is necessary that all nations, that is, the whole world, be smitten with plagues directed from heaven, so that the just people, worshipping God, may be liberated. And as then, signs were made by which their future disaster was shown to the Egyptians, so, at the last, there will occur strange prodigies throughout all the elements of the world, by which the imminent end may be known to all peoples.

As the end of this age is drawing near, therefore, it is necessary that the state of human affairs be changed and fall to a worse one, evil growing stronger, so that these present times of ours, in which iniquity and malice have advanced to a very high peak, can be judged, however, happy and almost golden in comparison with that irremediable evil. Thus, then, justice will become rare; so will impiety and avarice and cupidity and passion increase, so that if there will be any good ones then by chance, they may become the prey of the wicked, and be harassed on all sides by the unjust. And the evil alone will be the opulent, for the good are to be thrown about in all disgraces and in want. All justice will be confounded and laws will perish. Then, each one will have nothing, unless it be to

be sought or defended with his hands; daring and violence will get hold of all things. There will be no faith in men, no peace, no humanity, no shame, no truth, and so neither will there be security nor control, nor any rest from evil. Every land will be upset; wars will press everywhere; all nations will be in arms and will fight with each other; neighboring states will go to battle one with the other. Egypt, first of all, the foolishly superstitious, will pay the penalty and will be covered with blood as with a river.¹ Then, the sword will plough through the whole world, moving everywhere, and cutting down all as though reaping a harvest.²

This will be the cause of the destruction and confusion, that the Roman name, by which the world is now ruled—the mind shudders to say it, but I will say it, because it is going to be—will be taken from the earth, and power will be returned to Asia, and again the Orient will dominate and the West will serve.³ It should not seem strange to anyone, if a kingdom founded by such great effort and increased over so long a time and through the efforts of so many and such men, and confirmed at length by such great wealth, should at some time fall to ruin. There is nothing done by human strength which cannot equally be destroyed by human strength, since the works of mortal men are mortal. So also other kingdoms before, although they had flourished for a very long time, nevertheless, fell. For it has been handed down that the Egyptians and Persians and Greeks and Assyrians held control of the earth. When all these had been destroyed, the supreme control came to the Romans also. The more these stand out against all the other kingdoms in greatness, so much the greater will be their fall, for those things which are higher than others have more weight to bring to ruin.⁴

Not unsoundly did Seneca distribute the times of the Roman

1 Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 5.54 ff.; 77-85; 180.

2 Cf. *ibid.* 3.316,317.

3 Cf. *ibid.* Cf. Toynbee's warning about the crisis of the present in *A Study of History*, V, C (Vol. VI) pp. 298 ff.; IX, B (Vol. VIII) pp. 126 ff.; and especially V, C (Vol. V) pp. 152 ff.

4 Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 3.159-161; 8,6 ff.

city into ages: "The first was infancy, under King Romulus, by whom Rome was begotten, and brought up, as it were. Then came childhood, under the other kings, by whom she was increased and trained in many disciplines and institutions. But, when under the rule of Tarquin, she had already begun to grow up, so to speak, she did not bear the servitude, and, throwing off the yoke of proud domination, she preferred to obey laws rather than kings. And when the end of the Punic war came with that of her adolescence, then, finally with established strength, she began to flourish."⁵ When Carthage was removed, which for so long had been Rome's rival for empire, she stretched forth her hands toward the whole world on land and sea, until, with all kings and nations subjugated to her dominion, when material of wars began now to fail, she used her own strength and resources badly, and with these she exhausted herself.⁶ This was her first old age, when, torn with civil wars and oppressed with intestinal evil, she fell back upon rule by a single command, as though she had been revolved to another infancy. For when the liberty was lost which she had defended under the leadership and authority of Brutus, she grew so old that she was, as it were, not able to support herself without leaning upon the prop of those ruling.

If this is so, what remains except for death to follow old age? The speeches of the prophets tell that this will happen in a short while, but they use the circumlocution of other names, lest they be understood too easily. The Sibyls, however, say openly that Rome will come to an end and, indeed, 'by a judgment of God,' because she has held His name 'hateful' and has been inimical to justice and has put to torture the cherished people of the truth.⁷ Hystaspes also, who was a very ancient king of the Medes, from whom the river which is now

⁵ Seneca, frg. 99.

⁶ Either Seneca or Lactantius has closely followed Sallust here; cf. his *Catiline* c. 10.

⁷ Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 8.9-159; 165; 171-173.

called Hydaspes took its name,⁸ handed down to his posterity as worth remembering an admirable dream which contained the interpretation of a prophesying child, 'that the Roman Empire and name would be taken from the world.' And he foretold this much before the Trojan race was founded.

Chapter 16

Now how this is going to take place, lest anyone believe it impossible, I will show. In the first place, the dominion will be multiplied, and the highest power of all states, cut up and scattered among many functionaries, will be lessened. Then, civil discords will be sown perpetually, nor will there be any rest from deadly wars, until ten kings rise up on an equal basis who will share the world—not for ruling it, but for consuming it. These, having increased their armies to an immense size by leaving the fields destitute of tillers, which is the beginning of an overthrow and disaster, will lose everything, and will break up and destroy, and will greedily devour. Then suddenly, there will rise up against them a very powerful enemy from the farthest regions of the North who, destroying three tribes of that number which will then hold Asia, will be taken into alliance by the others and will be set up as chief of all of them. This one will pillage the earth with insupportable domination; he will mingle the divine and human; he will contrive execrable things, wicked to mention; he will stir up in his breast new plans so that he may establish for himself a proper empire, change the laws and sanction his own; he will contaminate, plunder, despoil, kill. Finally, changing his name and transferring the seat of empire, he will bring about the confusion and disturbance of the human race.¹

That, in truth, will be an abominable and detestable time,

⁸ Isidore, *Origines* 13.21.12.

¹ Cf. Dan. 7.2 ff.

when life will be pleasant for no man. Cities shall be torn up from their foundations, and men will perish, not only by fire and sword, but also by the constant earthquakes and floods, frequent sicknesses, and prevailing hunger.² The air will be vitiated and become corrupt and pestilential; now from unseasonable rains, again from unusual dryness. At one time it will be too hot, at another too cold. Nor will the earth give any profit to man: no plant, no tree, no vine will bear anything, and although they will have given very great hope in flower, they will deceive in fruit.³ The springs also, along with rivers, will grow dry, so that there will not even be a supply of drinking water on hand, and the waters will be changed into blood or bitterness. On account of this, the animals on the land will fail and so will the birds in the air and the fish in the sea.⁴ Then, too, strange prodigies in the sky will confound the minds of men with the greatest terror: the tails of comets, the eclipses of the sun, the color of the moon, and the fallings of stars.⁵ These things, however, will not happen in their customary manner, but there will suddenly arise unknown stars and those not seen by the eyes. The sun will be perpetually blackened, so that there will be scarcely any distinction between day and night. The moon will not then wane in three hours, but will make extraordinary meanderings and will be overspread with ever-present blood, so that a man may not readily recognize either the course of the stars or the pattern of the seasons, because summer may be in winter or winter in summer.⁶ Then, the year will be shortened and the month lessened and the day reduced to a narrow compass. Very many stars will fall so that the whole sky will appear black, darkened, without any lights.⁷ The highest mountains will also fall and be leveled with the plains; an unnavigable sea will

² For this section cf. Apoc. 6.

³ Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 8.178-181.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.* 8.342-344.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.* 8.190-194; 341; also Matt. 24.29.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.* 8.214 f.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.* 5.531; 8.204.

be set up.⁸ And lest anything be lacking to the evils of men and of the earth, the trumpet from heaven will be heard, which the Sibyl announces in this manner: 'The heavenly trumpet will blow its sound of many notes.'⁹ And so all will tremble and will shudder for fear at that dreadful sound.

Then, in very truth, through the wrath of God against men who have not known justice, there will rage the sword, fire, sickness, famine, and fear always hanging over everything. They will pray God at that time, and He will not listen; death will be desired, and it will not come. Not even night will give rest to fear, nor will sleep come to their eyes; but worry and wakefulness will wear the minds of men; they will weep and groan and grind their teeth; they will congratulate the dead and mourn the living.¹⁰ From these and many other evils solitude will come upon the earth and the world will be deformed and deserted. This is given in the Sibylline verses thus: 'The world will be un-worlded, unpeopled of men.'¹¹

For the human race will be so exhausted that scarcely a tenth part of the population will be left; and, when a thousand years have gone by, there will be barely a hundred men. Even of the worshipers of God two parts will perish, and the third, which will have been approved, will remain.¹²

Chapter 17

I will explain more fully how this will come about. Now, when the end of these times is imminent, a great prophet will be sent by God to convert men to a recognition of God, and he will have the power of working miracles. Wherever men will not hear him, he will close heaven and will hold back the rains; he will change water into blood and will torture them with

⁸ Cf. *ibid.* 8.234-237.

⁹ *Sibylline Oracles* 8.239.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.* 8.352-356; 2.306-311; also Apoc. 9.6.

¹¹ *Sibylline Oracles* 7.123.

¹² Cf. *ibid.* 3.544; also Apoc. 9.15, 18.

thirst and hunger; and fire will proceed from his mouth and burn whoever will attempt to hurt him. By these prodigies and powers, he will convert many to the worship of God. When these works of his have been carried out, another king will rise from Syria, born of the evil spirit, the overthrower and destroyer of the human race, who will destroy the remains of that previous evil one together with itself.¹

This one will fight against the prophet of God; he will conquer and kill him and suffer him to lie unburied. But after the third day, he will rise again and will be taken into heaven while all look on and marvel. That king, indeed, will be most offensive and will himself, but as the prophet of liars, set himself up as and call himself a god. He will order himself to be worshiped as the son of God. And there will be given to him power, so that he may do signs and wonders with the sight of which he may ensnare men to adore him. He will order fire to descend from heaven, and the sun to stand still in its course, and a statue to speak; and these things will be done at his word. By these miracles even many of the wise will be attracted to him.² Then, he will try to overturn the temple of God, and he will persecute the just people, and there will be pressure and contrition such as there never has been from the beginning of the world.³ Those who believe and come to him will be branded by him as though cattle; those who reject his mark will either flee into the mountains, or they will be seized and killed by well-contrived tortures.⁴ He will pile the books of the prophets upon the just and thus he will burn them.

And it will be given to him to make the earth desolate in forty-two months. That will be the time in which justice will be cast forth and innocence will be held in hatred, when the evil will hostilely ravage the good. No law or order or military discipline will be observed; no one will reverence gray

¹ Cf. Apoc. 11.3,5-9,11.

² Cf. Matt. 24.11,24.

³ Cf. Matt. 24.21.

⁴ Cf. Apoc. 13.4-8; 12-17; also 2 Thess. 2.3 f.

hairs; men will not recognize the duty of piety; nor will they show mercy to sex or infancy; all things will be confounded and mixed up against the right, against the law of nature. So, in one common game of freebooting, as it were, the whole world will be destroyed.

When these things take place, then, the just and the followers of truth will separate themselves from the evil and will flee into the deserts. Upon hearing of this the impious one, inflamed with wrath, will come with a great army and, with all the troops he has summoned, he will surround the mountain in which the just are staying in order to seize them.⁵ And when they see themselves surrounded and besieged on all sides, they will cry out to God with a loud voice and will beg heavenly aid. God will hear them and will send a great king from heaven who will save them, and set them free, and destroy all the impious with fire and sword.

Chapter 18

That these things would thus come to be, both all the prophets of the Spirit of God and also those seers with the inspiration of demons have foretold. That Hystaspes whom I mentioned above,¹ when he had described the evil of the end of this world, said that the just and the faithful ones, separated from the wicked, would stretch their hands to heaven and with mourning and weeping would implore the faith of Jupiter, and that Jupiter would look down to earth and hearing the prayers of men would wipe out the evil ones. All of this rings true, except for the one point, that he said Jupiter would do those things which God will do. But that point also was withdrawn—not without the deceit of the demons—that the Son of God would be sent then by His Father to set free

⁵ Cf. Heb. 11.38; Matt. 24.16; Apoc. 6.15.

¹ Ch. 15, n. 8.

the just by destroying all evils. Hermes did not dissimulate this. For in that book which is inscribed *The Perfect Work* (*Lógos Tèleios*), after an enumeration of the evils of which we have been speaking, he added these words: 'When these things thus came to pass, O Asclepius, then the Lord and Father and God and Designer, the First and One God, looking upon such things as had come to pass by His will, and setting that which was good against that which was in disorder, and calling back that which was straying, and cleansing that which was evil, dissolving it now with much water, now consuming it with swiftest fire, at times wiping it out by wars and by pestilences, reinstated His world and brought it to its former state.'²

The Sibyls also show that it will not be otherwise than that the Son of God will be sent by the Father Most High to liberate the just from the hands of the wicked and to put an end to the unjust with their raging tyrants. Of these one Sibyl speaks in this manner: 'And that lucky one will come desiring to sack the city. And then some king sent from God to his own will destroy the great kings and the best among mortals. Oh, and this judgment will be of an unchanging nature for men!'³

Another Sibyl says: 'And then God will send a king from the East who will stop the whole world from evil war.'⁴ And still a third Sibyl made this foretelling: 'Behold he will come mild and gentle in order to lift up the intolerable yoke of our slavery which was imposed upon our necks and he will break the unholy laws and harsh chains.'⁵

Chapter 19

Therefore, when the earth has been oppressed and when

² Hermes, p. 51a (Patricius); cf. Pseudo-Apuleius *Asclepius* c. 26; cf. also Sedulius p. 247.

³ *Sibylline Oracles* 5.107-110.

⁴ *Ibid.* 3.652,653.

⁵ *Ibid.* 8.326-328.

human resources have failed to destroy the tyranny of immense powers, inasmuch as there will be a settling down, when the world is captured with great forces of robbers, that disaster, so great, will need divine help. God, then, moved by the uncertain peril and by the pitiable praying of the just, will send forthwith a liberator. Then, the middle of the heavens will be opened, though the night be stormy and dark, so that the light of the descending God might shine as a flame in the whole world.¹ The Sibyl spoke of this in these verses: 'When he shall come, there will be brilliant fire in the midst of darksome night.'²

This is the night which is celebrated by us with a vigil on account of the coming of the King, our God. The plan of this night is twofold because in it, on the other hand, He received life when He suffered; and then, afterwards, He is to receive the kingdom of the world.³ For He is Liberator and Judge and Avenger and King and God, whom we call Christ, who will give this sign before He descends. Suddenly, a sword will fall from the heavens so that the just may know that the Leader of the holy warfare is about to descend, and He will come down in the company of angels to the middle of the earth. There will come before Him an inextinguishable flame, and the power of angels will draw into bands that multitude of just souls which have surrounded the mountain. Then, there will be slaughter from the third hour until evening, and blood will flow in the manner of a torrent. And after all his forces have been destroyed, that impious one alone will flee, and his power will perish from him.

Now this is the one who is called Antichrist, but he will lie that he is the Christ and will struggle against the truth. Conquered, he will flee, but often he will renew the war, and often he will be conquered again until, in the fourth battle, by the destruction of all his troops rendered unfit for war and finally captured, he will pay the penalty of his crimes.

¹ Cf. Matt. 24.27; for this entire section cf. Apoc. 19.11-21.

² *Sibylline Oracles* frg. 3.

³ Cf. Isidore, *Origines* 6.17.12.

The other chiefs and tyrants who have trodden upon the world will be led along with him, bound, to the King, and He will accuse them and convict them and reprove them for their deeds, and He will condemn them and give them over to the tortures they have merited.

So, when malice has been wiped out and impiety checked, the world which, subjected to error and crime for so many ages, has endured shameful servitude will be at rest. Those gods made by hand will not be worshiped any longer; but torn down from their temples and shrines, the images will be given to the fire, and they will burn with their wonderful gifts. Even the Sibyl, agreeing with the prophets, foretold that this would come to be. 'Men will tear down the idols and all their riches.'⁴ The Erythraean Sibyl also made the same pronouncement: 'The works and images of the gods made by hand will be burned.'⁵

Chapter 20

After these things, the lower regions will be opened up and the dead will rise, on whom the same King and God Himself will pass a great judgment, for the Father Most High will give to Him the greatest power of judging and ruling. We find this pronouncement on this judgment and reign in the Erythraean Sibyl's verses: 'When, therefore, this day shall have received its fatal end, then, there will come upon men the judgment of the immortal God; there will come upon men great judgment and power.'¹

Then, in another we find: 'Chaos then shall show Tartarus; then the earth will gape open, and all will come before the tribunal of their God and King.'² And in another part of the same Sibyl's prophecy: 'I will roll back heaven and I will open

⁴ *Sibylline Oracles* 8.224.

⁵ *Ibid.* 3.618.

¹ *Sibylline Oracles* 3.741-743; cf. Apoc. 20.4,5.

² *Ibid.* 8.241,242.

the depths of the earth, and then I will make the dead to rise again, resolving fate and the stings of death; and afterwards I will bring them to judgment, judging the lives of both the godly and the ungodly men.'³

Not all, however, will be judged, then, by God, but those only who have been engaged in the religion of God. For those who do not know God, because sentence on them cannot be brought unto absolution, are already judged and condemned; the holy writings giving this testimony: 'The unjust shall not rise again unto judgment.'⁴ Those who have known God, therefore, will be judged, and their deeds, that is, their evil works, will be weighed in the balance with their good works, so that, if the good and just works are more numerous and heavier, they will be given that blessed life; but, if the evil deeds outweigh the good, they will be condemned to punishment.

Here, perhaps, someone will say: 'If the soul is immortal, how is it set down as passible and an experiencer of punishment? If it is punished on account of its deserts, it will surely feel pain, and so death also. If it is not subject to death, then it is not subject to pain either: therefore, it is not passible.' This question or argument is thus met by the Stoics. The souls of men, as a matter of fact, do endure, nor are they reduced to annihilation by the intervention of death. Now the souls of those who have been just return pure, and impassible, and happy, to that celestial abode whence they have come, or they are drawn into certain blissful regions where they may enjoy marvelous delights. The impious, however, because they have been defiled with evil desires, tread a certain middle course between immortal and mortal nature. These have something of weakness or perishableness from the contagion of the flesh, being addicted to the desires and passions of which they drag a certain indelible alloy and earthly stain with them. Since this adheres deeply with the lastingness of time, souls of

³ *Ibid.* 413 ff.

⁴ Ps. 1.5, LXX.

this nature are restored (for punishment), so that if they are not extinguishable completely since they are of God, yet they become subject to suffering because of the stain of the body, which having been seared by sins, adds the sense of pain.

The poet expressed this idea in this manner:

Nay, when their life has left with the last light of day, however, not all the evil goes; nor do all bodily evils completely leave the wretched creatures. And it is necessary that many deeds piled up over a long time should get deeply rooted in them in strange ways. Therefore, they are exercised in sufferings and the punishments of old evils hang over them.⁵

These lines are very nearly true. For when the soul has made its departure from the body, it is, as the same poet says, 'like gentle winds and very much like a swift dream.'⁶

This is because it is a spirit and incomprehensible by its very lightness, but only to us because we are corporal; to God, however, to whom everything is subject, it is comprehensible.

Chapter 21

In the first place, then, we say that the power of God is so great that it comprehends even incorporeal substances and affects them as He wishes. The angels also fear God since they can be chastised by Him in a certain indescribable manner, and the demons are in dread because they are tortured and punished by Him. Why, then, is it strange if our souls, although they are immortal, should, nevertheless, be subject to punishment by God? Since they have nothing solid and touchable in them, they can suffer no force on the part of solid and corporal beings. But because they live in spirit only, they are tractable by God alone whose power and substance is spiritual.

Still, the holy books show us how the unjust are going to

⁵ Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.735-738.

⁶ *Ibid.* 702.

pay their penalties. Because they have committed sins with their bodies, they will again be clothed with flesh so that they may bear the sin-suffering in bodies. Yet, it will not be that flesh which God added to man, but very similar to this earthly flesh, and yet insoluble and lasting forever, in order that it may pay the penalty by tortures and by everlasting fire, the nature of which is different from that fire of ours, which we use for the necessities of life, and which is extinguished unless it be fed by a spark of some kindling material. That divine fire, on the other hand, lives forever of itself and keeps strong without any nutriment; nor does it have any mixture of fumes, but is pure and clear and fluid in the manner of water. For it is not driven in an upward direction by some force, as ours is, but the defect of the earthly body by which it is held and the inter-mingled smoke force it to leap about and fly upwards toward the sky with jumpy movement. The same divine fire with one and the same force and power will cremate and recreate the impious, and as much as it takes away from their bodies it will replace and will supply for itself eternal food. The poets transferred this quality to the vulture of Tityos.¹ Thus, without any loss of ever-replenishing body-supply, it will keep burning and afflict with a sense of pain.

The just also, however, when God will judge them, will be tried by Him with fire. Then, those whose sins shall warrant it, either by their weight or number, will be scorched with fire and burned. And when the fullness of their justice and maturity of virtue has been boiled free of dross, they will not feel the fire, for they have something of God in them which may, then, repel and ward off the power of the flame. So great is the power of innocence that that fire shrinks from it without doing harm, because it has received this power from God to burn the impious, and to refresh the just.²

¹ Tityos, the giant-son of Jupiter was slain by Apollo for his attempt on the chastity of Latona. As he lay, in the lower regions stretched out over a space of nine jugera, a vulture kept feeding on his liver which was constantly reproduced. Cf. Lucretius 3.992 ff.; Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.595; Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.457.

² Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 2.253-255; 8.410,411.

Neither should anyone think that souls are judged immediately after death.³ All are detained in one common custody, until the time will come when the Great Judge is to hold examination of merits. Then, those whose justice will be approved will receive the reward of immortality. Those whose sins and crimes will be revealed will not rise again, but will be buried with the impious in that same darkness, destined for certain punishments.

Chapter 22

Certain people think that these are figments of poetic imaginations, not knowing from where the poets took them, and they say that it is not possible for these things to happen. It is not strange that it seems so to them. The case is different from what is related by the poets. Though these are much more ancient than the historians and orators and other kinds of writers, still, because they were ignorant of the mystery of the divine dispensation, and because mention of the future resurrection had come to them from some obscure rumor, they published what they had heard rashly and lightly in the style of an imaginary fable. They themselves even testified that they were not following a sure authority, but opinion; Maro, for instance, said, 'It is all right for me to tell what I have heard.'¹

Although the secrets of truth have been corrupted, then, in part, the matter itself, however, is found to be more true because of the fact that the poets agree in part with the prophets, which is enough for us for proof of the thing. Some reason, though, underlies their error. For although the prophets in constant pronouncements declared that the Son of God would judge concerning the dead, and although this pronouncement was not a hidden one, because they (the poets) thought that the God-Ruler of the heavens was none other

³ It seems unnecessary to comment on the obvious errors in Lactantius' theology. Cf. the General Introduction.

¹ Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.266.

than Jupiter, they handed down that the Son of Jupiter presided in judgment over the lower regions. They did not select, however, Apollo or Liber or Mercury, who are regarded as heavenly dwellers (of Olympus), but Minos or Aeacus or Rhadamanthus; someone who was both a mortal and just.² With poetic license, therefore, they corrupted what they had heard, or opinion changed the truth, scattered abroad on different tongues and by various words. With reference to that about which they sang, a restoration to life again for the shades below after a thousand years, we have Maro's treatment as follows: 'All these, when a thousand years shall have finished their course, the god calls out to the river Lethe in a great company, to be sure forgetful now of the realms above, so that they may visit again those arches and begin to wish to return into bodies.'³

This reckoning deceived them because the dead will rise again, not after a thousand years of their death, but so that they may reign with God for a thousand years after being again restored to life. For God will come that He may raise up to everlasting beatitude the returned-to-life souls of the just, all stain from this world cleansed, and with their bodies renewed. And so, beyond the waters of oblivion, the other things are true. That (the water of oblivion) they made up for this reason, lest anyone make this objection to them: Why did they not remember that they had at one time lived or who they were or what they did? Nevertheless, it is not very likely, and the whole thing is rejected as though contrived with story-telling license.

To us who affirm the resurrection and teach that souls do not go to another life, forgetful of themselves, but return in the same sense and aspect, this is objected: 'So many ages have already passed by. Has anyone ever risen from the dead, that

² Minos, a son of Zeus, lawgiver in Crete. Rhadamanthus was his brother. According to fable, Aeacus was still another son of Zeus by Europa. This one became king of Aegina, father of Peleus and Telamon, and grandfather of Achilles and Ajax. All three were made judges in the lower regions because of their just rule.

³ Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.748-751.

from his example we may believe it possible?' Resurrection is not possible while injustice still holds sway. In this age men are killed by force, by the sword, by treachery, by poison; they are afflicted with all injuries, want, prisons, tortures, proscriptions. From this it is inferred that justice is hated because all who wish to follow God are not only held in hatred, but are even visited with all disgraces and tortured with many kinds of punishments, and they are forced to the worship of the gods made with hands, not by reason or truth, but by abominable laceration of their bodies. Is it fitting, then, for men to rise to these same things or to return to a life in which they cannot be safe?

Since the just are treated so vilely and removed so easily, what should we think would have happened if someone, returning from the underworld, had received life back again? Surely, he would be removed from the eyes of men, lest upon his being seen or heard of all would abandon the gods and be converted to the worship and religion of the one God. Therefore, it is necessary that the resurrection take place once, when all evil shall have been removed, since it is not right that those who have risen again should die any more or be violated in any way, so that they may enjoy the blessed life of those whose death has been canceled.

The poets, since they knew that this life abounded in all evils, introduced the idea of the 'river of forgetfulness,' lest souls remembering evils and labors might refuse to return to the world above. Vergil, for example, wrote: 'O Father, must it be thought that some souls go from here to the heavens above and then again return to sluggish bodies? What so dire longing for light is this that the wretched things possess?'⁴

They did not know how or when this was supposed to take place, and so they thought that they were reborn and, at length, went back into the womb and returned to infancy. Whence, even Plato, treating of the soul, said: 'From this it can be learned that souls are immortal and divine, the fact

⁴ *Ibid.* 719-721.

that in children genius is mobile and easy to perceive, because they quickly seize upon those things which they learn, and because they do not seem to learn them for the first time, but it seems as though they recall and remember them.'⁵ In this matter, a wise man very foolishly believed the poets.

Chapter 23

They will not, therefore, be reborn, which is not possible, but they will rise and will be clothed with bodies by God, and they will be mindful of all the deeds of their past life. And, settled among celestial blessings and enjoying the happiness of innumerable good things, they will give thanks to God in whose presence they will be because He has destroyed all evil, and because He has raised them to His kingdom and perpetual life. The philosophers tried to say something about this resurrection¹ also, but they did it in as corrupt a manner as the poets did. Pythagoras held that souls passed into new bodies, but he prated foolishly; for from men they went into animals and from animals into men, and he said that he himself had been remodeled from Euphorbus. Chrysippus did better who Cicero says held up the porch of the Stoics.² For in the books which he wrote on providence, when he was speaking of the beginning of the world, he said this: 'Since this is so, it is clear that nothing is impossible, even that we, after our death, when a certain space of time has gone by, are to be restored into the same state in which we seem to be now.'³

But let us go from human to divine words. The Sibyl speaks these verses: 'Difficult is every kind of matter. When judgment of the world and of mortals shall have come, which god him-

⁵ Plato, *Meno* 85 C; *Phaedo* 72 E; cf. Cicero, *Tusculans* 1.24.57 f.; *De Senectute* 21.78.

¹ It is strange that in this one place Lactantius uses the transliterated Greek word for resurrection, *anastasis*.

² Cf. *Prior Academics* 2.54.75.

³ Cf. Gercke, *Chrysippea*, frg. 14.

self shall make, judging both the impious and the just together with them, then he will consign the impious to the shadows and the fire. Those who are the just, however, will come again upon the earth, god giving them spirit and honor and life.'⁴

Now if not only the prophets, but also the seers and poets and philosophers agree that there will be a resurrection of the dead, let no one ask of us how it can be. A reckoned account of the divine works cannot be rendered; but, if from the beginning God has set up man in some indescribable way or other, let us believe that he can be restored when old by the Same One who made him new.

Chapter 24

Now I will add the rest. The Son of the Most High and Mighty God will come, therefore, to judge the living and the dead. The Sibyl bears witness to this in saying: 'In all the earth, then, there will be confusion of mortals, when the omnipotent one himself shall come before the tribunal to judge the souls of all the living and dead and the whole world.'¹

When He shall have destroyed injustice and made the great judgment and restored to life those who were just from the beginning, He will stay among men for a thousand years and will rule them with most just dominion. Another Sibyl in her rage and incantation proclaims this: 'Listen to me, ye humans, the King Eternal will come.'²

Then, those who will be living in bodies will not die, but will generate an infinite multitude during those same thousand years, and their offspring will be holy and dear to God.³ Those who will be raised from the dead will be in charge of the living as judges. The nations, however, will not be completely ex-

⁴ *Sibylline Oracles* 4.40-43; 186; 187.

¹ *Sibylline Oracles* 8.81-83; cf. Apoc. 20.1-6.

² Frg. 1.

³ Cf. Isa. 6.12.

tinguished, but certain ones will be left unto the victory of the Lord, so that they may be triumphed over by the just and subjugated to perpetual slavery. At this same time, also, the prince of demons who is the contriver of all evils will be bound in chains, and he will be in custody for the thousand years of the heavenly power whereby justice will reign on earth, lest any evil be exerted against the people of God. After his arrival, the just will be gathered together from the whole earth, and when judgment has been passed, the holy city will be set up in the center of the earth in which the Founder Himself may abide with the just who are its rulers.⁴ The Sibyl designates this city when she says: 'And the city which God desired, He made it brighter than the stars and the sun and the moon.'⁵

Then, there will be taken away from the world those dark-nesses with which the sky is obscured and blocked from sight, and the moon will receive the brightness of the sun, nor will it be diminished any more. The sun, however, will become seven times brighter than it now is.⁶ The earth, in truth, will disclose its fecundity and will produce the richest crops of its own accord. Mountain rocks will ooze with honey, wines will flow down through the streams, and rivers will overflow with milk. The world itself will rejoice and the nature of all things will be glad, since the dominion of evil and impiety and crime will have been broken and cut off from it. Beasts will not feed on blood during this time nor birds on prey, but all things will be quiet and at rest. Lions and calves will stand together at the manger to feed; the wolf will not steal the sheep; the dog will not hunt; hawks and eagles will not do harm; a child will play with snakes.⁷

⁴ For this section, cf. Jerome, *On Illustrious Men* 18. Papias held this view and Jerome says that many follow him and say that after the resurrection the Lord will reign with the saints. Cf. also Tertullian, *On the Hope of the Faithful*; Gennadius (edition by Oehler) 1, p. 349; Pseudo-Augustine, *De Ecclesiasticis dogmatibus*, c. 25 (Vol. 8, appendix p. 78 E Maurist ed.).

⁵ *Sibylline Oracles* 5.420,421.

⁶ Cf. Isa. 30.26.

⁷ Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 3.619-623; 8.210 ff.; Isa. 11.6 ff.; 65.25.

Then, there will take place those things which the poets said happened in the golden times when Saturn was reigning. Their error arose from this, because the prophets generally give out and pronounce the happenings of the future as though they were already finished. Visions were presented to their eyes by the Divine Spirit, and they saw those as though they were happening and taking place within the bounds of their sight, as it were. When rumor had carried their prophecies abroad little by little, since those who were not initiated to the revelation did not know to what purpose they were spoken, they thought that all those things had been completed in past ages; but, certainly, these things could not have taken place and been completed under the reign of man. However, when the false religions are destroyed and crime is checked and the earth is subjected to God, 'The trader himself shall leave the sea, nor shall the sea-going pine trade wares; every land will bear all things. The earth shall not suffer the plows nor the vine the pruning hook. And the sturdy ploughman, too, will unyoke the bulls.'⁸

Then, also, 'Slowly shall the plains grow yellow with waving corn, and on wild brambles purple grapes shall hang, and the hard oak shall exude dewy honey. Wool shall no longer learn to counterfeit different colors, but the ram in the meadows will itself change its fleece, now to a sweetly reddening purple, and again to a saffron yellow. Scarlet shall clothe the grazing lambs of its own accord. The very goats shall bring home udders filled with milk, and cattle shall not fear great lions.'⁹

The poet spoke these things according to the songs of the Cumaean Sibyl. The Erythraean one, however, gives us these verses: 'Then the wolves and sheep will be given a feeding place together in the mountain haunts, and will feed together on panthers laid before them and the bears with calves along with all grazing animals; and the carnivorous lion eats bran

⁸ Vergil, *Eclogues* 4.38-41.

⁹ *Ibid.* 28-30; 42-45; 21,22. Lactantius modifies Vergil's arrangement, or perhaps he is quoting the lines from memory.

from the feed box with the cubs; and dragons will go to sleep with asps.¹⁰

In another place the prophecy is on the richness of things: 'And then God will give to men a great song. For the earth and the trees and all the countless creatures of earth will give their real products to men—wine and honey and sweet, white milk, and grain, whatever is best of all for men.'¹¹

And yet another Sibyl in the same manner: 'The holy earth alone having reverence will see all these things; the streams from the honey-dripping rocks and from the water fountains sweet nectar will flow for all mortals.'¹²

Men will enjoy, therefore, the most tranquil and most abundant life, and they will reign together with God. Kings of the nations will come from the ends of the earth with gifts and presents to adore and honor the great King, whose name will be famous and venerable to all peoples which will be under heaven and to the kings who will rule on the earth.¹³

Chapter 25

These are the things to come which were spoken of by the prophets. I have not deemed it necessary to put down their testimonies and words, since it would be an endless task, and the size of a book would not hold such a great amount of illustrative material, and, lest it be at the same time, with so many saying similar things in one vein, boring to the readers. Furthermore, so that it might prove very strongly those things which I said, not by our own sources, but from the writings of others; and that I might show that, not only among us, but also among those who press against us, is there held consigned the truth which they refuse and reject. If anyone wishes to

10 *Sibylline Oracles* 3.787-791.

11 *Ibid.* 3.619-623.

12 *Ibid.* 5.281-283.

13 Cf. Isa. 60.6.1; Ps. 71.10,11.

study and know these prophecies more carefully, let him drink from the very font itself and he will find more wonderful things than we have included in this book.

Perhaps someone may ask now when those things we mentioned are going to take place. I have already showed above¹ that that change must take place when six thousand years have been completed and that that last day of the final conclusion is already approaching. It may be known from the signs which have been predicted by the prophets. For they foretold the signs by which the end of time was both to be expected by us and feared, even unto the single days. Since, however, this summary is being completed, those who wrote on the times, gathering material from the sacred books and from various historians, show how large the number of years is from the beginning of the world. Though they may vary and disagree somewhat in the sum-total, however, the entire expectation or length of time left seems to be no greater than two hundred years.² Even the general condition itself makes clear that the fall and ruin of things will be soon, except for the fact that with the city of Rome being unharmed, it seems that nothing of that sort has to be feared. But when the head of the world shall fall and the onrush begin to take place, which the Sibyls say will take place,³ who will doubt that the end has then come for human affairs and for the world? That is the state which up to now holds up all things, and we must pray and adore the God of heaven, if His statutes and decrees can, however, be put off, lest that abominable tyrant come more quickly than we think, that one who works such great havoc and wipes out that light at whose destruction the world itself will collapse. Now let us get back to commenting on those other things which are going to follow these events.

¹ Cf. ch. 14.

² Cf. Hippolytus, *In Daniele prophetam* in Photius, *Bibliotheca* cod. 202; frg. 59 (de Lagarde's edition).

³ Cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 3.364; 8.165.

Chapter 26

A little while ago¹ we said that, at the beginning of the holy reign, it would happen that the prince of demons would be bound by God. But the same one, when a thousand years of this reign, that is, seven thousand years in all, begin to be terminated, will be let loose at last; and, when let out from custody, he will proceed and stir up all the peoples, who will then be under the sway of the just, to bring war upon the holy city. And there will be gathered together from the whole world innumerable peoples of the nations, and they will besiege and surround the city.² Then will come a very strange wrath of God upon the nations and it will reduce them by war to one man. As soon as it shall strike the earth as violently as possible, the mountains of Syria will be ripped by its motion and valleys will sink into a chasm and the walls of all cities shall fall. And God shall cause the sun to stand for three days lest it fall, and He will inflame it and the heat will descend too close, and there will be a great combustion over the warlike and impious peoples, rains of sulphur, hail stones and drops of fire. Their spirits shall melt in the heat; their bodies shall be worn down in the storms; and they will strike each other with the sword.³ The mountains shall be filled with corpses and the fields shall be covered with bones. And in those three days the people of God will be hidden in the bowels of the earth, until the wrath of God against the nations and the last judgment is ended. Then, the just will come up from their hiding places and will find everything covered with cadavers and bones. But the whole race of the wicked will utterly perish; nor will there be in this world any longer any nation except the people of God alone. Then, through seven continuous years, the forests will be untouched, wood will not be cut away from the mountains,

¹ Ch. 24.

² Cf. Apoc. 20.1-9.

³ Cf. Ezech. 38.20-22.

but the arms of the nations will be burned, and there will be no longer war, but peace and everlasting rest.⁴

When, however, the thousand years shall be completed, the world will be renewed by God, heaven will be folded up, and the earth changed. And God will transform men into the likeness of angels, and they will be white and shining as snow, and they will always be in the sight of the Omnipotent and will sacrifice to their God and serve Him forever. At the same time, there will take place that second and public resurrection of all, during which the unjust will be raised unto everlasting sufferings. These are they who worshiped idols made by hands, who did not know or who denied the Lord and Parent of the universe.⁵ But their master will be seized with his ministers and will be condemned to punishment, and together with him the whole band of the impious will be burned in perpetual fire forever in the sight of the angels and the just.

This is the teaching of the holy prophets which we Christians follow. This is our wisdom which those who worship perishable images or embrace an empty philosophy deride as though it were folly and vanity, because we are not accustomed to defend it and proclaim it publicly, since God orders us to quietly and silently keep His secret in hiding and within the depths of our conscience and not to strive in stubborn contention against those ignorant of the truth, who revile God and His religion mercilessly, not for the sake of learning, but of arguing and mocking. It is fitting and proper, then, that our revelation be concealed and protected as faithfully as possible, especially by us who bear the name of the faithful.⁶ They attack this silence on our part as if it were from a bad con-

⁴ *Ibid.* 39.9,10; cf. *Sibylline Oracles* 3.724-734.

⁵ Cf. *Apoc.* 20.10-15.

⁶ This is a concluding witness to Lactantius' role as a representative of his milieu. He is rightly charged with doing a better job of denouncing paganism than of explaining and upholding Christianity. No doubt, this is chiefly because he was not any better prepared or qualified. Perhaps, too, he was cautious and wary, by habit, of betraying the secret to the world at large; and, even though his work was intended to be an open apology of the faith, his natural inhibitions may have remained too strong.

science; whence they fabricate even certain horrible notions about the chaste and innocent, and they willingly believe those things which they have feigned.

Chapter 27

Since we have been brought to the goal of the proposed work, the seven divisions having been gone over, there remains for us to exhort all to take up wisdom with true religion, the power and function of which turn on this, that despising and casting aside the earthly error by which we were previously held (when we were doing service to perishable things and desiring perishable goods), we might be drawn to the eternal rewards of the heavenly treasure. In order to be able to secure these, we ought to put aside as soon as possible the seductive pleasures of this present life which captivate the souls of men by their pernicious sweetness. How great a happiness must it be considered to be withdrawn from these defects of earth and set out to that most just Judge and most indulgent Father who for labors bestows rest, for death life, for darkness light, for earthly and ephemeral goods eternal and heavenly ones. The bitterness and misery which we endure in this world doing the works of justice cannot be compared in any way with this reward.

Now,¹ all fictions have been laid to rest, Most Holy Emperor, from that time in which the Most High God raised you up for the restoration of the domicile of justice and the protection of mankind. Under your rule of the Roman state, we who are the worshipers of God are not any longer regarded as criminal and wicked. Now, the truth is coming forth into the clear light, and we are not convicted as unjust men who attempt to do the works of injustice. No one casts reproach upon us any longer for the name of God. No one any longer

¹ The next five paragraphs form the concluding panegyric of Constantine. Cf. Bk. I, ch. 12; also the Introduction.

labels us, who are alone of all men religious, as irreligious, because we despise images of dead beings and worship the One God, living and true.

The providence of the Supreme Godhead has brought you to the height of princely eminence, so that you might be able, with true piety, to rescind the evil decrees of others, to correct abuses, to provide with a father's clemency for the safety of men, and, finally, to remove those evil men from the state, men whom God cast down from their heights of power into your hands, so that it might be clear to all what true majesty is.

For those who wished to take away the worship of the one God of heaven, in order to defend impious cults, now lie in ruin. You who defend and love His Name are excelling in virtue and prosperity, and you will enjoy your immortal rewards most happily. They suffer and have suffered the penalties of their crimes. The powerful right hand of God protects you from all dangers; it bestows upon you a quiet and tranquil reign with the greatest approval of all men.

Not undeservedly has the Lord and Ruler of all by a love of preference chosen you as the one through whom He restored His holy religion, since you alone stood out among all as one who might furnish outstanding examples of virtue and holiness in which you would not only equal, but even surpass (which is truly great) the glory of ancient princes whom fame numbers among the good. They were in their nature, perhaps, only like the just, for one who knows not God, the Master of the universe, can attain a likeness of justice, but not justice itself. But you, both by the innate sanctity of your manners, and by the knowledge of the truth of God, are fulfilling the works of justice in every action.

It was fitting, therefore, that in rearranging the condition of the human race, the Divine Plan should make use of you as an organizer and assistant. We beseech Him with daily prayers; first, that He may guard you especially whom He wished to be a guardian of affairs; and then, that He may in-

spire you with the desire to ever persevere in the love of the Divine Name. This is salvific to all: to you for happiness, to others for peace.²

So, if we wish to be wise, if we wish to be happy, we ought to consider and set before ourselves, not only those Terentian grades of punishment, where 'There must be labor, even in a mill; there has to be flogging; shackles must be worn,'³ but those that are much more atrocious still: prison, chains, and torments must be suffered; pains must be sustained; finally, death itself must be undergone and borne, since it is clear to our consciousness that that perishable pleasure will not be without punishment nor virtue without divine reward. Therefore, all should strive to steer themselves to the right way as soon as possible, or if the virtues have been undertaken and practiced and the labors of this life patiently undergone, to merit to have God as their Consoler.

For our Father and Lord, who established and supported the sky, who brought in the sun and the other stars, who walled in the earth, held in balance by its weight with mountains, who surrounded it with the sea and marked it off by the rivers, and who breathed into being and made from nothing whatever there is in this world, perceiving the errors of men, sent a Guide who opened up for us the way of justice. Let us all follow this Guide. Let us hear Him. Let us obey Him most devoutly. For He alone, to use the words of Lucretius, 'has purged the hearts of men with true-speaking words and has fixed an end of desire and fear. He has revealed the highest good to which we are tending. He showed what is to come to be, and the way, and the small path by which we might be able to struggle toward it on the right course.'⁴ He did not show it merely, but He also went before us on the way, in case anyone might shrink from the way of virtue by reason of its difficulty.

² Here we find also the triumphant theme of *The Deaths of the Persecutors*.

³ Terence, *Phormio* 2.1.19.

⁴ Lucretius 6.24-28.

Let the way of perdition and deceit be deserted, if it is possible, as a way on which death is concealed, covered over by the enticements of pleasure. And the more one discerns, as the years bring on old age, that the day is approaching on which he must pass out of this life, the more should he consider how he may depart from it in purity; how he may come innocent before the Judge. Nor should he act as certain people do in their reliance upon blinded minds who, the strength of the body already failing, are warned in this point of the last pressing necessity to strive more eagerly and ardently to exhaust the pleasures of passion. Let each one set himself free from the chasm while he may, while he has the opportunity; and let him be converted to God with his whole heart, so that he may wait in security for that day when the Ruler and Lord-God of the world will hold judgment on the deeds and thoughts of individual men.

Whatever things are sought after here on earth, let him not only disregard them, but even shun them, and let him judge his soul preferable to those deceitful goods, the possession of which is uncertain and faltering. For they migrate daily and go out much more quickly than they had entered, and still, even if it is permitted to us to enjoy them up to the end, they must be abandoned, certainly, for others. We men can take nothing with us except a life well spent, lived without any harm. He will come rich to God, he will be wealthy, in whose favor there will stand continence, mercy, patience, charity, faith. This is our inheritance which cannot be snatched from anyone or transferred to another.

Is there anyone who would wish to procure and gain these goods for himself? Let those come who hunger, so that filled with celestial food they may put down a constant hunger. Let those come who thirst, so that they may draw the water of salvation from the everlasting fountain with filled throats. By this food and drink of God, the blind will see, and the deaf will hear, and the dumb will speak, and the lame will walk,

and the simple will be wise, and the sick will grow strong, and the dead will rise again.⁵

Whoever will tread upon the delights of the world with virtue, that highest and true Judge will raise him up to perpetual light and life. Let no one trust in riches, in public office, even in royal power; those things do not make a man immortal. And whoever shall cast aside the purpose of man, and, pursuing present goods, shall prostrate himself on the ground, shall be punished as a deserter of the Lord and Commander, his Father.

Therefore, let us tend toward justice, which alone will guide us as an inseparable companion toward God; and, 'While the spirit controls these members,'⁶ let us show an indefatigable service to God. Let us keep stations and vigils. Let us bravely engage with the enemy whom we know, so that, as victors and in triumph over our vanquished adversary, we may attain from the Lord the reward of virtue which He Himself promised.

⁵ Cf. Matt. 11.5.

⁶ Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.336.

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